

THE CONFLICT BETWEEN LOVE AND MORALITY

P. MCCARTHY MORE



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**THE CONFLICT BETWEEN
LOVE & MORALITY**

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THE CONFLICT
BETWEEN
LOVE AND MORALITY

BY
P. McCARTHY MORE

LONDON:
ARTHUR L. HUMPHREYS
187 PICCADILLY, W.

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PREFACE

PEOPLE who live in an era of change should try to realise their good fortune. They may have to suffer some discomfort, but at least they have no excuse for boredom. Such an era has its responsibilities also, which in a greater or lesser degree rest upon each one of us. As all matter consists of atoms, so all populations consist of individuals, therefore to a certain extent what every one thinks matters. We now know that every being is consciously or unconsciously a species of wireless telegraphy station, sending out and receiving brain-messages . . . and these brain-messages are influences, and of these influences the *Zeitgeist* is, in fact, the embodiment. What a few people think matters exceedingly ; what many people think appears—apart from their possession of the

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vote—to matter very little indeed, but in the long run, *everything matters*.

We may shortly expect to see a Bill framed on the results of the recent Divorce Commission. Once a question becomes involved with politics, it can no longer be considered in the same impartial light. Party issues at once become involved in the game of ‘follow-my-leader.’ It may (apart again from his vote) matter very little what the man-in-the-street, individually, thinks about clauses in the Home Rule Bill, or on the question of Welsh Disestablishment, . . . because such questions do not directly involve his personal interests.

But the question of laws relating to morals and marriage affects every one, because every one is the outcome of a marriage, legalised or otherwise, and therefore it is of extreme importance that we should consider the question, impartially and searchingly, before it becomes involved in party politics. As soon as we begin to sound the depths of sexual morality and marriage, we find our-

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selves touching the problems of life at many unexpected points. For instance—we must ask ourselves: What is religion? What are morals? And we shall find that the housing problem, the wage system, and other burning social questions of the day are involved, and that we must face these also.

True we may stand aside and decide to take no active part. But at certain moments of world-evolution, to stand passively aside is, willy-nilly, to take an active part in the help or hindrance of social problems. Such inaction may become action of a sort the very reverse of what we desire. If I see a man crossing the line, unconscious that an express train is upon him, and fail to warn him of its approach, I may argue that I took no active share in his death, yet for that reason the coroner will not exonerate me from blame.

Above all things let us abandon hypocrisy and the game of 'let's pretend' when the morality of ourselves as a nation is under discussion. Let us admit that whatever our theories, our practice as regards sexual

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morality leaves almost everything to be desired. In our great desire to appear respectable we have failed to be sincere. The aim of the writer in this book has been to examine into the question of morality as it affects love and marriage, to consider the conflict which has long been waged between love and morality. Finally, to propose as an alternative to the old theory of the enmity between Matter and Spirit the ideals of the New Morality.

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THE CONFLICT BETWEEN LOVE AND MORALITY

CHAPTER I.

IF we are going to study the general attitude of to-day towards so important

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Page 164.—For *The Spirit of Growth and the City Streets*
read *The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets*.

at a loss. Either our thoughts themselves lack definite outline, or through ignorance of their significance we use words which fail to express our meaning.

To follow the history of words is an enchanting pursuit. Many words possess different meanings at different periods, and have an ill-defined position at present. Moreover, at best, 'language is a rough generaliser.' Dictionaries, which are sometimes a help, at

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CHAPTER I.

IF we are going to study the general attitude of to-day towards so important a question as that of 'sexual morality,' we must, at the very start, decide what these words signify for us. By a careless or ignorant use of terms we lessen their value; we imagine that some word expresses our thought, but when asked for a definite explanation we are at a loss. Either our thoughts themselves lack definite outline, or through ignorance of their significance we use words which fail to express our meaning.

To follow the history of words is an enchanting pursuit. Many words possess different meanings at different periods, and have an ill-defined position at present. Moreover, at best, 'language is a rough generaliser.' Dictionaries, which are sometimes a help, at

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other times intensify the obscurity. For instance, if I look up 'moral' and see that it means 'virtuous,' and then, turning to the explanation of 'virtuous,' I find it to be 'according to the moral law,' I am not much enlightened.

There is perhaps no word more difficult to exactly define than 'moral,' no word which is more thoughtlessly, carelessly, and irrelevantly used. Its very derivation (which is from the Latin *mor*, nom. *mos*, i.e. a manner, custom) implies the mutability of its character ; 'the dictates of custom being dictates of morality, it is obvious that the study of moral ideas will to a large extent be a study of customs.' Although the line of distinction between 'customs' and 'morals' may be so fine as to be sometimes unperceivable, it does nevertheless exist. Whereas a 'custom' is merely a habit of behaviour, a 'moral' implies the presence at some time of its existence of a motive,¹ religious or

¹ *Motive*: a consideration which determines choice or induces action.

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otherwise. Like 'manners' and 'customs,' 'moral' is a term whose meaning is dependent upon the state of civilisation at a particular time in a particular place, and its application is therefore temporary and local. Though morals, manners, and customs may exist in all places and at all times, they will differ in themselves according to the locality where they exist. All these words imply social relations, hence the conditions or qualities which they express differ not only in different countries, but in the same country at different periods, and even for different people in the same country and at the same period. As an instance, although the attribute of 'modesty' exists in savage tribes as well as in civilised countries, we find that whereas in the latter clothing is a *sine qua non* of modesty, among certain uncivilised tribes the wearing of a garment is looked upon as 'indecent.'¹

When we apply the word 'moral,' what

¹ Westermarck, *History of Human Marriage*, chap. ix., p. 195. (2nd Edition, 1894.)

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exactly do we intend to express? If we describe the tendency of some book to be 'moral' or 'immoral,' or condemn some commercial transaction as 'immoral,' what is the meaning conveyed? 'Morality is a matter of social discipline; it is not an inherent principle in nature like the law of gravitation, but is a sort of understanding arrived at by nations or communities for the better regulation of their affairs.'¹ Originally 'men pronounced certain acts to be good or bad on account of the emotions those acts aroused in their minds, just as they called sunshine warm and ice cold on account of certain sensations which they experienced, and as they named a thing pleasant or painful because they felt pleasure or pain.'² So, even at the present time, our apprehension of everything in this world is subjected to the influence of our own individuality and consciousness, and must pass through the medium

¹ J. F. Nisbet, *Marriage and Heredity*, chap. xii., p. 173.

² Westermarck, *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*, vol. i., chap. i., p. 1. (Macmillan & Co., New York, 1906.)

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of our senses, mental and physical—it is only by these means that impressions reach us and that we are made aware of things exterior to ourselves. That different individuals will receive different impressions of the same things is inevitable. To take a common instance in proof of this: ask two people how large the moon appears to them to be. The difference will probably be surprising, and depends upon the impressions conveyed by their physical vision. One cannot, therefore, make an exact statement holding good for the whole of the earth's inhabitants as to the apparent size of the moon to their vision when beheld from earth: one can only say that it appears to them of dimensions varying approximately from such to such diameter.

Morals, as we have seen, derive originally from customs, and customs are largely influenced by environment and natural circumstances; often, as these alter or disappear, the custom survives and people continue to regard a practice as being desirable in the

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Present merely because it has been convenient in the Past. 'What Society calls Morality is nothing more than an order of social life to which custom and use has imparted an appearance of sanctity; hence, in spite of insufficiency, it is very liable to assert itself with great self-consciousness, just as servants are apt to be more arrogant than their masters.'¹ As communities form, those members of it with the strongest personalities, the greatest mentality and magnetism, will impose their judgments upon the weaker personalities: when men of superior intellect and character are wanting, the influence of the majority will carry the day, until another master-mind comes to disturb their opinions and substitute his own for them. 'Whatsoever a great man doeth, that other men also do; the standard he setteth up, by that the people go.'² The majority of

¹ Rudolf Eucken, *Main Currents of Modern Thought*. Translated by Meyrick Booth, B.Sc. Page 401. (T. Fisher Unwin, 1912.)

² *The Bhagavad Gîtâ*. Translated by Mrs. Besant. Third Discourse. (Theosophical Publishing Society, 1909.)

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the community, having accepted the new standard, will endeavour to imbue the minds of their children with similar ideals: an inherited standard of behaviour thus becoming custom.

Morality, in its generally accepted sense, is in fact a standard of behaviour in our social relations, independent of religious teaching; for although religion invariably profoundly influences the moral standards of a people by supplying motives other than expediency for their behaviour, an atheist may very well be a perfectly moral citizen. The 'moral' man, in the general sense, will thus be he who conforms, or who appears to conform, to the standard of his generation. Again, as Professor Westermarck says, in regard to 'many of the moral judgments ordinarily passed by men,' they are 'applications of some accepted general rule: conformity or nonconformity to the rule decides the rightness or wrongness of the act judged of. But whether the rule be the result of a person's independent deductions, or be based upon authority, the fact that his moral

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consciousness recognises it as valid implies that it has an emotional sanction in his own mind.’¹ In spite of these inherited opinions, any mind still capable of independent thought will continue to be liable to the influences of its own individual perceptions, and the judgment formed on these impressions will sometimes, very disconcertingly to itself, bring it into complete opposition to established standards—for ‘we are not willing to admit that our moral convictions are a mere matter of taste.’ ‘One man’s justice is another man’s injustice, one man’s beauty another man’s ugliness, one man’s wisdom another’s folly; as one beholds the same objects from a higher point.’² The only hope for human progress in moral standards lies in individual conceptions of them: as the vessel shapes the liquid in it, as its size decides the amount it shall contain, so the greater natures will always form the larger and higher ideals of morality. The history of the world

¹ Westermarck, *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*, vol. i., chap. i., p. 6.

² Emerson, *Essay on Circles*.

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is the history of the mutability of morals. He who is revered as a hero in one age is classed as a robber in another, and yesterday's criminal may be to-morrow's saint.

Unfortunately, very few people have the inclination or will give the time and trouble necessary to form independent individual judgments on conduct for themselves. 'What was good enough for my parents is good enough for me' is a pretty familiar phrase. Moreover, with the majority, if they ever had the inclination, it was probably suppressed in their youth, and the general standard so effectually imposed upon them that in manhood they no longer seek to investigate its merits or its limitations. The easier course is to accept the verdict of the majority, just as it is easier to buy a ready-made article than to make it for oneself. Hence most people are satisfied to regard things from the standpoint of their early education, rather than put themselves to the extreme mental trouble of investigating them, or of comparing their own outlook with that of others. 'In all ages man, in the

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mass, has hated the trouble of thinking, has paid, implored others to do his thinking for him.’¹

‘That is *my* opinion,’ a man will often say, and it may very well be his in the sense that he holds it; but in the sense that it has been formed by his own judgment, ten to one the odds are against his having any valid claim to it. ‘Society is the school in which men learn to distinguish between right and wrong. The headmaster is Custom, and the lessons are the same for all. The first moral judgments were pronounced by public opinion.’²

Again, ‘laws which are based on customs naturally express moral ideas prevalent at the time when they are established. On the other hand, though still in existence, they are not necessarily faithful representatives of the ideas of a later age. Law may be even more conservative than custom. Though the latter exercises a very preservative influence on

¹ Cicely Hamilton, *The Great State*, p. 239. *Women in the Great State*. (Harper Brothers, 1912.)

² Westermarck, *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*, vol. i., chap. i., p. 9.

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public opinion, it *eo ipso* changes when public opinion changes.’¹

As long as the mass of human beings do not think for themselves, or form independent judgments, a general Moral Law must be laid down for the majority: the highest ideal of morality which they are capable of apprehending must be made the general temporary standard. Pioneers will always be in advance of this standard, and their aim should always be: first, never to lay down that any standard is final; second, to encourage every individual to think out all moral problems for himself, instead of trying to impose ready-made conclusions upon him. ‘Conduct does not possess a moral character unless it proceeds from free decision and manifests an original life: if, in any way, it comes to light that a presumably moral action proceeds from mere habit, mechanical compulsion, or the pressure of authority, and does not involve personal decision and application, the action at once

¹ Westermarck, *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*, vol. i., chap. vii., p. 166.

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loses its distinctive character and drops out of the moral sphere.’¹ The reluctance to part with old ideas and long-established customs is partly due to a real or imaginary reverence for the past, and for the ‘good old times,’ but much more to an unwillingness to face new situations. Hence we have repeated instances of a nation intellectually in advance of its own Laws (for a law is the authoritative enforcement of a custom)—Laws which it has outgrown, but to which it clings as a youth might cling to a garment which no longer fits him. Thereby, custom gradually arrives at ‘filling each estate of life and profession with abject and servile principles, depressing the high and heaven-born spirit of man far beneath the condition where God created him or sin hath sunk him.’² The stage is reached where the letter kills the spirit, and what was ‘moral’ under the old conditions becomes ‘immoral’

¹ Rudolf Eucken, *Main Currents of Modern Thought*, p. 389.

² Milton, *Prose Works*. Preface to the *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*. (William Pickering, 1851.)

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under the new, because the legalised standard of behaviour is inferior to the recognised ideal.

‘The one thing that the public dislikes is novelty the public dislikes novelty because it is afraid of it.’¹ Repeatedly has a Columbus of the spiritual or scientific world been put in chains or to death. Independent spirits in the World of Art, of Letters, of Music have met with the most bitter condemnation, amounting for them to a sentence of death. The innovators in manners or customs meet with a like fate. ‘Oh, Lord! What a fuss there is as soon as anybody wants to do anything new or great.’² Until a ‘manner’ is sanctioned as a ‘custom’ it is regarded with the deepest suspicion and disapproval, for ‘it is only by slow degrees that the ideas of a new time become strong enough to release mankind from ancient prejudices.’³ Yet time almost invariably vindicates the

¹ Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man*, p. 46. (Arthur L. Humphreys, 1907.)

² August Strindberg, *Marriage*, p. 44.

³ Westermarck, *History of Human Marriage*, chap. xvi., p. 376.

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pioneers of life: the same public who have condemned to martyrdom are later proud to canonise. Although our eyes have been perpetually opened to this oft-recurring phenomenon, we are not thereby deterred from waging war on modern innovators. As it was in the beginning, so it is now, and ever shall be until Humanity arrives at loving Truth in more than theory, and until it accepts the law of growth and development in the spiritual as well as in the physical sphere. We, who condemn the Jews for the murder of Christ, would undoubtedly assign him the same fate were he to reappear amongst us again to-day. Our weapons may differ: the wood and nails of the Cross are replaced by the no less destructive methods of the Press—nor would the blame of such an execution rest upon the Press alone, but upon each one of us who accepts its verdicts merely because we are thereby relieved of the effort of forming an independent judgment.

Strangely enough, coexistent with this opposition to innovation in serious matters

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we see a consistent demand for it in the more frivolous departments of life. In regard to amusements, light literature, dress, and luxuries we demand that they be re-created day by day. Let there be new dances, no matter how ungraceful—new styles in dress, no matter how unserviceable or even uncomfortable. And it was so. And the world (its desire for novelty in such matters being satisfied) sees that it is good. These differing attitudes of man towards novelty in different spheres we may compare to his demand for an endless variety in the dressing of the beef, mutton, and veal with which his hunger is appeased, and the horror he would manifest were he to be offered a dish of hippopotamus or rhino flesh, which are elsewhere regarded as dainties.

In fact, in the realms where thought, judgment, and discrimination are required, novelty is abhorrent to the public. Outside those regions, they cannot get enough of it.

Although, as we have seen, the Law of Morality cannot be definitely fixed, yet its

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existence is no illusion. 'It is recognised, in theory at least, that morality, either alone or in connection with religion, possesses a higher value than anything else ; that rightness and goodness are preferable to all other kinds of mental superiority, as well as of physical excellence.'¹ The general Moral Law is both stable and unstable, and herein, would we but realise it, is the proof of its grandeur ; its instability is evidence of its vitality. Moral Law is only in process of discovery. The whole law of nature in regard to the Universe of which we are conscious is that of birth, growth, decay, and as in it nothing derives from nothing, but everything derives from some other thing, so nothing vanishes into non-existence, but everything is transmuted. If the Moral Law of to-day is not to be the Moral Law of to-morrow, that is cause for rejoicing, not for lament—since the Moral Law of to-morrow, though different, will be greater than ours.

¹ Westermarck, *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*, vol. i., chap. i., p. 16.

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The error of Religion has been in assigning limits to the Moral Law, in supposing that the pronouncements of even its greatest teachers are the last word that can be uttered on the subject, and in trying to impose a uniform interpretation of that teaching and to narrow its fulfilment into external observances.

The Moral Law for each man is his apprehension of the Ideal Perfection; the influence of its appeal will be in exact proportion to his own capacity to receive and respond.

At the first suggestion that the Moral Law is mutable, an outcry is made: it is regarded as a highly dangerous doctrine that will lead to widespread libertinism. 'If,' says Professor Westermarck, 'that which appears to each man as right and good, stands for that which is right and good, if he is allowed to make his own law, or to make no law at all; then, it is said, everybody has the natural right to follow his caprice and inclinations, and to hinder him from doing so is an infringe-

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ment on his rights, a constraint with which no one is bound to comply provided that he has the power to evade it. 'This theory,' he continues, 'was long ago drawn from the teaching of the sophists, and it will no doubt be still repeated as an argument against any theorist who dares to assert that nothing can be said to be truly right or wrong. To this argument may first be objected that a scientific theory is not invalidated by the mere fact that it is likely to cause mischief. The unfortunate circumstance that there do exist dangerous things in the world proves that something may be dangerous and yet true. Another question is whether any scientific truth really is mischievous on the whole, although it may cause much discomfort to certain people.'¹ Wherein, however, does the danger of this theory lie? The danger lies the other way; if we are convinced that any humanly delivered judgment is final, complete and incontrovertible, we are in

¹ Westermarck, *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*, vol. i., chap. i., p. 18.

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danger—for we admit the incapacity of growth. We need be in no fear. No high moral truth will ever be displaced except to make room for a higher—that is, our conception of the high moral truth will give place to a higher conception. We can never claim to have laid hold on the Moral Law itself—that is something ulterior to ourselves which we can only apprehend through the medium of our spiritual and mental individualities, as a ray of light must pass through our physical organ of vision before we can apprehend it. To lay down an immutable Moral Law for Man is to atrophy his spiritual senses.

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CHAPTER II.

THAT the present rate of the world's advance in scientific discovery is a gallop is obvious to all. Whereas yesterday we clung to the roads, to-day the dream of flight has been realised. To-morrow, or the day after, the law of levitation may be discovered, and the manufacture of boots be thereafter dispensed with. Or again, in a few centuries, the organ of mental telepathy may become so developed that communication by post will be unnecessary, and man may become his own system of 'wireless' telegraph and telephone.

In the region of Morality we see no corresponding advance. Our progress there is a creeping one, and why? For many centuries, thanks largely to the repression imposed by ecclesiastical forces, investigations into the laws of science were strenu-

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ously opposed: forgetful that 'in light there can never be danger,' — priestly authority pronounced any probing into the 'secrets of Nature' to be irreligious. Genesis stated that the world had been created in six days, and to make investigations which prove that the process of creation had involved hundreds of millions of years was to prove the historical untrustworthiness of the author of Genesis. Moses had written Genesis by the direct inspiration, if not at the dictation, of the Earth's Creator, therefore to question his authority was to doubt the Word of God. Now that scientists have happily freed themselves from the childish reasonings and consequent thralldom of Sacerdotalism, they are free to adventure anywhere, and, realising that they have still everything to learn, they set themselves in all humility to the task of research.

In the regions of Morality, on the other hand, the Church has laid down, and still strives to convince the blind sheep within her fold, that the Mind of the Great Spirit of the Universe has long since been unfolded to her,

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and that the laws thereby revealed are immutable and 'alter not.' To them what was declared to be 'moral' thousands of years ago must needs be 'moral' to-day, since by divine revelation it was declared to be so; and if it was 'moral' in Asia, it must be equally so in Europe, in Africa, and all over the earth's surface. Progress in the region of morality is by such a theory rendered impossible.

As religious influence has played so great a part in the history of morals, sexual and otherwise, it were good to know what exactly the word 'religion' signifies. Not a very easy task this. 'I might,' says Salomon Reinach, 'fill a whole volume with enunciation and discussion of the various definitions of religion propounded by modern philosophers.'¹

Its derivation, he says, comes — not as is generally supposed, from the Latin word meaning 'to bind' — but from a word which signifies the exact opposite of 'to neglect.' 'Religion is, then, a faithful observance of

¹ Salomon Reinach, *Orpheus*. English Translation by Florence Simmonds. Introduction, p. 2. (W. Heine-mann, 1909.)

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rites ; this is useful to know, but it leaves us in total ignorance of the nature of religious sentiment.’¹

After giving examples of various definitions of religion offered by different philosophers, Reinach continues: ‘As there are a great many religions, so there are a great many limitations, and I propose to define religion as: *A sum of scruples which impede the free exercise of our faculties.*’

There are, indeed, a great many ‘religions.’

¹ ‘There is probably no subject in the world about which opinions differ so much as the nature of religion, and to frame a definition of it which would satisfy every one must obviously be impossible. . . . By religion, then, I understand a propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man which are believed to direct and control the course of nature and of human life.’—J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, vol. i., chap. i., p. 63. (Macmillan & Co., Limited, 1900.)

For another definition :—

‘Religion may perhaps be defined as man’s instinctive effort to bring a central aim into his life, and so provide himself with an authoritative standard of values. In its highest and purest form, Religion controls man’s life both as a whole and in all its essential details, through the central aim or spiritual ideal which it sets before him, and the consequent standard of values with which it equips him.’—Edmond Holmes, *What Is and What Might Be*, chap. i., p. 18. (Constable & Co., 1911.)

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They, we may take it, are one thing—they assume an outward and definite form, and imply ‘a faithful observance of rites.’ ‘Religion,’ in its larger sense, is something other: it implies the recognition of and reverence for a Power greater than that of Man, something often vague, inward, undefined, but nevertheless intensely *real*, and independent of sacerdotal control and influence.

Religions have their primal origin in vague fears, leading to scruples, or of fears resulting from scruples.¹

For arbitrary reasons, in a primitive race, certain objects are rendered ‘taboo’; this ‘taboo’ implies a scruple, and he who disregards it will suffer a penalty. The story of the Garden of Eden is the story of a primitive ‘taboo.’ For reasons not explained, a certain tree in that garden was ‘taboo’ to Adam; he infringed the ‘taboo’ by eating of its fruit, and his penalty was expulsion from the garden. ‘Animism on the one hand, and

¹ Definition, *Scruple*: ‘an anxiety or uneasiness.’ See Webster’s New International Dictionary.

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taboos on the other, such are the essential factors of religion.' Animism¹ is the investing of non-human beings and of objects in the visible world with human life and sentiments. In order to propitiate these unknown but suspected forces, and to avert their wrath at the infringement of scruples, rites were organized and offerings made to them. 'Men saw many activities they could not emulate: they beheld the fall of the thunderbolt, the violence of the winds, the agitation of the waves. . . . They imagined beings more capable than themselves, capable of producing these great effects.' They then began to try to picture to themselves what these beings might be like, what were their forms and what their natures. Just as we might imagine, they pictured them more or less after their own likeness, not in form only, but in their characteristics. 'It is not surprising then that men should have imagined several gods, often hostile to one another, cruel, capricious, unjust and ignorant. . . . The heathen have always made

¹ Derivation from 'anima,' Latin for 'soul.'

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their gods after their own image; thus, as man became more perfect, the gods also improved.'¹

This tendency in man to create a deity after his own image is evident in all ages. With those qualities which men most admire will they adorn their conception. In a warlike age his chief characteristics will be power and courage, in more peaceable times mercy and justice will be his prevailing attributes. Of those rites arranged for the worship and propitiation of these more or less crudely imagined deities the priests became the organizers and exponents. By degrees they became associated with all the vital events and happenings of human life, and the priest consequently acquired an increasing influence over the lay mind.

As one religion succeeds another, the 'sum of scruples' shifts or enlarges its sphere. The rites connected with worship change their name, religious reformers take them on, adapt

¹Quotations from Fontenelle in S. Reinach's *Orpheus*, Introduction, pp. 11, 12.

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them to their theories, and give them a fresh or altered significance. The danger to any religion arises when the rites themselves are regarded to the exclusion of their significance. Whenever this occurs, the particular religion falls into decay and is superseded. The priest comes to be regarded as the vicegerent of the Power whom men strive to propitiate for the infringement or disregard of scruples, consequently he acquires the power to avert or to inflict punishment. Not only is he specially in the confidence of the dreaded authority, but he shares to some extent his powers. In fact, as a baker is he who specialises in bread, a lawyer he who specialises in law, so a priest is he who specialises in some one or other 'religion.' The lawyer saves us the trouble of mastering the intricacies of our legal system, the priest saves us the trouble of mastering the pros and cons in the sphere of moral scruples. Moreover, as the lawyer steers us amid the labyrinths of legalities so that we may avoid the penalties of justice, so the priest tells us what we must do or refrain from doing

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to avert the penalties of that higher court which we name 'the heavenly justice.'

As laziness lies at the root of most of our failings, we are very glad to transfer the responsibilities of investigation from our own shoulders, and to accept our 'religion' ready baked from the hands of recognised experts. 'If in these days of absorbing secular activity Man continues to tolerate the theories and practice of the religious experts, the reason is—apart from the influence of custom and tradition and of his respect for venerable and "established" institutions—that they are things which he has neither time nor inclination to investigate, and which he can therefore afford to tolerate as being far removed from what is vital and central in his life.'¹

In More's *Utopia* there were very few priests of any description, and why?—because so high a standard was set for their behaviour that all but the very few fell short of it. The ideal for the priesthood being that it should

¹Edmond Holmes, *What Is and What Might Be*, p. 32.

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set an example of saintly living, it is natural enough that the majority should fail to achieve it; the priest then merely degenerates into a moralist, one who, whilst claiming a Divine mandate, endeavours to force his own beliefs and standards, with all their limitations and prejudices, upon the public mind. Moreover, 'though priests habitually enforce conduct which one way or other furthers preservation of the society; yet preservation of the society is so often furthered by conduct entirely unlike that which we now call moral, that priestly influence serves in many cases rather to degrade than to elevate.'¹ If men must submit themselves to a control of their spiritual faculties, the sphere of the Church's authority should be limited to the direction of their beliefs in regard to the 'Higher Powers.' The sphere of the State should lie in the directing of social conduct. But as behaviour is, or should be, the outward evidence of man's inward and spiritual con-

¹ Herbert Spencer, *Principles of Sociology* (1896), vol. iii., part vi., chap. xiv., p. 140.

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victions, as conduct can hardly be separated from belief, so the interests of the Church and State are continually overlapping. The history of the Christian Church has been the history of a professedly spiritual organization trying to monopolise the control of man's behaviour as well as of his beliefs. Although the Church at one time exerted an almost universal temporal as well as spiritual control over the lives of men, ever since the introduction of printing that power has been on the wane. Formerly she was able, through the ignorance of the masses and their consequent superstition, to impose her beliefs on their credulity, but with the spread of education men were bound to form independent judgments and to investigate and question her authority.

At the present day, although 'there is a general idea that England is a Christian country,' yet this profession of Christianity is largely only nominal. The figures of the last census of attendance at religious worship in London prove that three-quarters of the popu-

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lation of larger London were 'indifferent or hostile' to all forms of public worship. 'The indiscriminate baptism of children without sponsors, and without the faintest probability that there will be any religious training in their homes; the religious celebrations of marriages where there is no real Church membership or Christian belief. . . . Such things as these are of almost everyday occurrence,'¹ showing that many individuals while still clinging, largely no doubt from habit, to the old religious celebration of rites, have lost all faith in their inward significance. Is this falling away from old beliefs a proof of spiritual indifference? 'History,' says Rudolf Eucken, 'in so far as it affects the inner life, does not exhibit a continual ascent. It shows us not only the rise and growth of true spiritual movements, but ensuing periods of exhaustion, so that we find recurring periods when the spiritual life must needs

¹ Rev. Walter Hobhouse, *The Church and the World*. Bampton Lectures, 1909, pp. 274-278. (Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1910).

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leave its active manifestation in human existence and retire into itself to take deeper and stronger root. In this fashion alone can it transcend the age and prove effective in liberating the truth present in the age from all the uncertainties which confuse and divide us. We are again face to face with such a period.' 'Every one' (he continues) 'who is alive to the necessities of the age must work, according to his capacity, towards this goal, namely, the deepening of life and the renewal of human culture.'¹ Renewal is, in fact, a discarding of outworn and outgrown forms of truth and the substitution of new standards adapted to the new requirements of the human mind.

In spite of the evident falling away from old traditions and faiths, which is one of the most remarkable features of the present times in regard to morals and customs, it is by the habit and teaching of Christianity that the population of our own country is still largely influenced. Although it may be inaccurate to

¹ Rudolf Eucken, *Main Currents of Modern Thought* (Eng. Trans. by Meyrick Booth), Introduction, p. 28.

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describe this country as Christian, yet the general standards of our morality are those set by a Christian civilisation. Morality, as we have seen, may be described as a standard of behaviour. What is the attitude of the Church towards morality, and towards sexual morality in particular? What has that attitude been in the past?

Although the Church's methods have been, to a vast extent, diametrically opposed to the spirit of Christ's teaching, yet she has always declared herself to be the official exponent thereof. We must turn to the record of his sayings in the Gospels. Any knowledge that we have of his words and actions is derived therefrom—to what extent are these records authentic? 'Whatever the words of the well-known Scriptural texts may mean, there appears to be considerable doubt as to whether the words themselves have been accurately reported, conflicting as they are in many important respects.'¹

¹S. B. Kitchin, *A History of Divorce*, 1912, chap. xii., p. 267. (Chapman & Hall, 1912.)

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‘With regard to the origin of the Synoptics,’ writes the Abbé Loisy, ‘it appears certain that not one of them rests directly and completely upon oral tradition, that not one of them is the immediate expression of memories preserved by an eye-witness. The hypothesis of tradition does not suffice for the explanation of the problem. The attribution of the first Gospel to the Apostle Matthew is untenable; that of the second Gospel to a disciple of Peter raises very serious objections; and if the third Gospel was written by a disciple of Paul it must be acknowledged that this circumstance does not throw very much light upon its composition, its tendencies, and its object.’

‘The second Gospel,’ he continues, ‘dates probably from about the year 70; the first and the third cannot be much anterior to the first century, and what is more, it is possible that it may have been touched up and additions made in the first half of the second century. These books were the property of Christian communities, and not of recognised

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authors whose rights one would be obliged to respect.’¹

Salomon Reinach’s conclusions with regard to the probable date of the Gospels, in the form in which they have come to us, are as follows :—

Matthew—a short time before or after
70 A.D.

Mark—60–70 A.D.

Luke—80–100 A.D.

John—towards the end of the first, or beginning of the second century.²

‘To allege,’ says Loisy, ‘that the earliest testimony as to the origin of the Gospels is certain, precise, traditional, and historical, is to falsify its character entirely ; it is, on the contrary, hypothetical, vague, legendary, and partisan ; it shows that at the period when the Gospels were brought forward to check the extravagances of Gnostic heresy, only the

¹ L’Abbé Loisy, *Les Evangiles Synoptiques* (ed. 1907), chap. ii., p. 81.

² Salomon Reinach, *Orpheus*, chap. viii., p. 218. (Translated by Flornece Simmonds.) (W. Heinemann, 1909.)

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vaguest information existed as to their origin.’¹

These historical criticisms, be it noted, are not the work of those anxious to destroy the fabric of Christendom. What says Reinach of Christianity? ‘It remains,’ he asserts, ‘not only a great institution, but the mightiest spiritual force which has ever transformed souls, a force which continues to evolve in them.’²

Seeing, then, how undependable is the testimony of the Gospels concerning the actual teaching of Christ, how are we, at this distance of time, to distinguish his real from his spurious sayings? We can only do so by trying to realise what was his general attitude towards the problems, realities, and duties of Life, and by comparing therewith whatever reputed sayings of his appear difficult to reconcile with or even contrary to such an attitude of mind. ‘We may say,

¹ L’Abbé Loisy, *Quelques Réflexions*, p. 127. (Quoted by S. Reinach in *Orpheus*, chap. viii., p. 217.)

² *Orpheus*, chap. viii., p. 232.

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then, that when words are put into Christ's mouth which express the exact opposite of what he truly believed, and which end, as it were, in themselves, the reporter has, wittingly or unwittingly, made Christ the mouthpiece of his own convictions; and we may assume that the words in question were never really spoken.' In fact we need 'a preliminary acquaintance with the mind and soul of Christ, an acquaintance which scholarship cannot give us, but which it is open to any one who will free his mind from prejudices and foregone conclusions to endeavour to acquire.'¹ *

¹ Edmond Holmes, *The Creed of Christ*, chap. i. (John Lane, 1904.)

* 'Christ cast the grains of His doctrine here and there which requires a skilful and laborious gatherer, who must compare the words he finds with other precepts, with the end of every ordinance and with the general analogy of Evangelic doctrine.' *Milton's Prose Works*, vol. ii. (W. Pickering, 1851.) For a more modern opinion on this subject of the uncertainty of Scriptural interpretations, see Sir G. Gray, speaking on the Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Bill in 1857: 'I feel that we are at liberty to adopt such rules with regard to this matter for the benefit of society as we may think most conducive to human interests and most in accordance with the general precepts of the Gospel.' (*Hansard*, vol. 147, p. 856.)

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It is not within the scope of this book to make a critical and exhaustive inquiry into the attitude of Christ towards the social and psychological problems of his day. He was a reformer far ahead not only of his own times, but of ours. Many of his counsels of perfection are still quite beyond us, and we should do better frankly to admit this rather than try to prove, whenever we find his sayings too difficult for us, that his meaning was the reverse of or quite other than his words.

All his teaching evinces a perfect detestation of hypocrisy. 'Hypocrisy' is feigning to be what one is not, and is derived from the Greek expression for one who plays a part on the stage. The men to whom he so frequently applied the epithet 'hypocrites' were the members of two sects who were supposed by their learning and example to act as lamps to the bewildered eyes of their fellow-mortals—namely, the Scribes and Pharisees. The former were the exponents and translators of the law; the latter belonged to a saintly class who professed to lead their lives on a higher

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spiritual level than the ordinary human being. Both were hateful to Christ, because in their extreme observance of the letter of the Law they totally ignored its spirit.

Strangely enough, amongst the professing followers of Christ this practice of exalting the letter to the total neglect of the spirit has been pushed to extremes as great as those of the Pharisees. Of the fact that a phrase or text may be twisted to the most opposite interpretations history gives constant examples, and it also shows 'the representatives of the Church to have been almost without exception on the wrong side in every social reform.'¹

Perhaps no better example can be quoted in proof of the amazing interpretations which have been given to Scriptural texts than the attitude of the large bulk of the Clergy, Catholic and Protestant alike, towards the Abolition of Slavery. It was by them held and proclaimed, on Scriptural authority, that slavery was an institution of God's own

¹ Earl Russell, *Divorce*, chap. ii., p. 32. (W. Heinemann, 1912.)

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ordaining, and desirable in his eyes. Texts were freely quoted in support of this view.¹

It was the Pharisees and Scribes who tried to probe into the views held by Christ on the question of sexual morality. Like other great spiritual teachers, he was very reluctant to be drawn on this subject. It is true that he was reproached with being the friend of publicans (*i.e.* the tax-gatherers, who were treated as social outcasts) and of prostitutes. He met this accusation by saying that it was exactly the likes of these whom he had come to save. Further, he added, they would enter the Kingdom of Heaven before the professedly righteous who regarded them with horror and contempt. He was questioned on ticklish matters of law by those who hoped to trip him up. He disappointed them by asserting that he had come, not to destroy the Law, but to fulfil it, but he also indicated the existence of an ideal of life superior to the teachings of the Mosaic Law. Thus, after the

¹ Westermarck, *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*, vol. i., chap. xxvii., p. 711 and footnotes, and p. 712.

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Pharisees had questioned him as to the expediency of divorce, when his disciples remarked that it would perhaps be better, under such hard conditions as those he proposed, to abstain from marriage altogether, he implied that for those who wished to lead the highest form of spiritual life, such abstinence was not only desirable but necessary.

In the same way, St. Paul pointed out that married people should care for one another, whereas the man who sought after complete spiritual perfection must care only for the things of the Spirit. This was why Christ proclaimed that unless a man hated his nearest relatives, *hated even his own wife*, it was futile he should attempt to be a disciple of his. True that by 'hatred' he could not imply that evil feeling which leads to cruelty and murder, but it is equally clear he meant that whosoever was eagerly bent on the search after spiritual perfection must dissociate himself from all other loves and ties. He must, in fact, seek to attain to the level of that

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love 'which knows not sex, nor person, nor partiality,' and for which, as Emerson says, our earthly loves are but the training.

This is a hard saying indeed, 'he that is able to receive it, let him receive it.' Most of us cannot do so, and the only honest course is to admit at once that we are as yet incapable of so great a surrender, and must strive, so far as this life is concerned, to follow a less exacting ideal. 'If thy thought droops from such height; if thou be'st weak to set body and soul upon me, constantly, despair not! Give me lower service!' Moreover, 'take heed that no man, being 'scaped from bonds, vexeth bound souls with boasts of liberty.' The greater is to bear with the lesser love and not to look down upon it.¹

The law of Moses—while condemning to death both participants in the sin of adultery—permitted a man to divorce his wife under certain conditions. According to the three Synoptics, Christ is reported to have said that

¹ See *The Song Celestial* and *The Light of Asia*, Sir Edwin Arnold.

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whoever put his wife away, and whoever married her after such divorce, was guilty of adultery. Not only so, but every man who looked with lustful thoughts on a woman was guilty of the same fault.

One fact of which Christ's whole teaching gives proof is that he was very severe on intellectual sins, such as hardness of heart (which in his eyes appears to be the greatest obstacle to perfection), pride, uncharitableness, hypocrisy. But when we look to see how he treated those women guilty of adultery with whom he came in contact, we find that he was unfailingly gentle and lenient with them.

There is no more touching story in the Gospels than that of the woman taken in adultery, who was brought to Christ by members of the professedly ultra-saintly class. 'The law commands us to put her to death: what do you say?'—and Christ, without any comment on the justice or injustice of this law, replied by an appeal to a higher one—namely, that only the sinless are justified in condemning the faults of others. By the

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finding of this ordinance, the woman's accusers, one by one, admitted their incapacity to judge her. When they were all gone, Christ turned to the woman and said: 'What has become of your accusers? Has no one condemned you? Not one? Very well, neither do I condemn you to this terrible death by stoning. Go your way now, but do not sin again.'

Another time, when Christ was taking a meal in the house of a professedly saintly man, a sinful woman came and performed a wonderful act of homage to him. His host was amazed at him for allowing it. 'Dear me!' he said to himself, 'this man, if he were the prophet that he is reported to be—that is, one who has the gift of inward vision—would see that this woman is a sinner.' Anyhow, Jesus was enough of a prophet to read his thought, for he answered it by the parable of the two debtors. The greater the sin, the greater would be the love following on its forgiveness.

As regards any social institutions adopted for the benefit of mankind, we may be certain

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Christ would have said very much what he did concerning the Sabbath—that it was appointed for man's benefit, and must not be converted into an incubus. He set large and high moral ideals, and left them for individuals to adapt to particular cases.

Thus we see:—

1. That, so far as the testimony of the Gospels goes, Christ regarded as binding for life any sexual union (for we may be very certain that by marriage he did not mean only a union sanctioned by a legal or religious ceremony), and any violation of such union he denounced as 'adultery.'

2. That he was very severe on intellectual sins, such as spiritual pride and hardness of heart, the punishment of which should be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

3. That he was very lenient to those who were guilty of physical errors, being described as the friend of social outcasts and harlots—from which we must conclude, not that he condoned the sins of the body, but that he regarded intellectual sins as far greater

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hindrances to perfection. We may note, in passing, that the very reverse view is held by his so-called 'followers' to-day.

4. That when closely questioned as to his own views on the expediency of marriage, his answer conformed with the views of other great spiritual teachers in recommending the higher forms of love which are irrespective of 'form and sex,' but in condemning those who despised its less advanced manifestations. Love was identified by Christ himself with the great Spirit of the Universe; therefore, whatever its form, whether the love of a woman for her child, whether associated with sex or dissociated from it—as is the devotion of the great lovers of Humanity—all love is a manifestation of the Divine, and must be revered accordingly.

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CHAPTER III.

THE enforcement of celibacy and the holding of it in high esteem is an outcome of civilisation ; for by primitive man in general it is looked upon with contempt. ‘ So indispensable does marriage seem to uncivilised man,’ writes Westermarck, ‘ that a person who does not marry is looked upon almost as an unnatural being, or, at any rate, is disdained.’

The idea that celibacy is desirable is of entirely religious origin, and is ‘ intimately allied to the belief that sexual intercourse is the great transmitter of original sin.’ We see the beginnings of it even in primitive tribes, in many of which religious men and women have to live a single life. The curious notion that ‘ there is something impure and sinful in marriage, as in sexual relations generally,’¹ survives in great force, actually,

¹ Westermarck, *History of Human Marriage*. Second Edition, chaps. iii. and vii.

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if not admittedly, amongst the most highly civilised races to-day. 'Love and union with the loved one (however one may endeavour in verse or in prose to prove the contrary) will never facilitate the attainment of a goal worthy of man, but will ever render such attainment more difficult.'¹

With regard to the existence of 'original sin.' In the Catholic Baptismal Service the Evil Spirit, which is supposed to be in possession of the infant, is three times exorcised. 'Go out of him, thou unclean Spirit, and give place unto the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete.'

The idea of something naturally 'unclean' in the nature of man pervades all ecclesiastical teaching; this notion of uncleanness being especially associated with all sexual intercourse. Hence the origin of the custom, evidence of which is to be found in almost every religion all the world over, that both the priests and priestesses of those religions

¹ Tolstoi, *La Sonate à Kreutzer*, Postface, p. 396. P. V. Stock, Editeur. (Paris, 1912.)

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should practise celibacy. In the first place, the priestess was often regarded as married to the god whose temple she served, and sexual intercourse with any man was therefore forbidden to her. Then, again, for both men and women, sexual intercourse being regarded as defilement, those who occupied priestly functions were bound to abstain from it. Moreover, 'separation from the material world is the ideal of the religious enthusiast, whose highest aspiration is union with God conceived as an immaterial being, as pure Spirit.'¹ 'The flesh,' wrote St. Paul, 'lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other.'² Matter was never regarded as possibly being a manifestation of spirit, but always as its opposite, and even enemy. Although St. Augustine stated that to God nothing whatsoever is evil, 'Yea, not only to Thee, but also to Thy Creation as a whole, be-

¹ Westermarck, *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*, vol. ii., chap. xxxix., p. 363.

² Galatians, v. 17.

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cause there is nothing without which may break in, and corrupt that order which thou hast appointed it,' yet he himself waged a continuous war against all natural impulses.

He had a nature naturally loving and taking delight in beautiful sights and sounds. 'I sought what I might love, in love with loving. To love then, and to be beloved, was sweet to me.' And after his conversion his natural tastes and impulses and warmth of heart still continually asserted themselves. He confesses, as though it were a sin, that he wept for his mother's death 'for a small portion of an hour. Read it who will, and interpret it how he will: and if he finds sin therein . . . let him not deride me.'¹ He had a naturally healthy appetite, yet God, he said, had taught him that he should set himself to take food 'as a physic.' He feared also lest his deep enjoyment of religious music might prove to be a snare. This constant war between his natural im-

¹ See *Confessions of St. Augustine*.

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pulses, and his feeling that they must be detrimental to the spiritual ideal that he sought, did not result in happiness. Here on earth he must stay, 'but would not; there I would, but cannot; both ways miserable.'

Almost endless examples might be given of this religious attitude towards the natural functions of the body, and the hindrance which they are supposed to offer to a proper growth in spirituality. 'Buddhism regards sensuality as altogether incompatible with wisdom and holiness; it is said that a wise man should avoid married life as if it were a burning pit of live coals.'¹ Compare this with Tolstoi's views in his postscript to *The Kreutzer Sonata*: 'Sexual love—Marriage—this is the cult of oneself; in any case, it is a hindrance to the service both of God and man, and, in consequence, from the Christian point of view, it is downfall, it is sin.'²

¹ Westermarck, *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*, vol. ii., chap. xli., p. 409.

² Count Leo Tolstoi, Postface à *La Sonate à Kreutzer*, p. 403.

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A very perplexing question naturally presents itself to the thinking, religious mind when confronted with statements such as these. Are things that the Deity created, or that have been evolved in accordance with his laws, evil in themselves? 'In the beginning,' we are told (by those very persons who regard all sexual intercourse as partaking of the nature of sin) God saw that it was bad for man to be alone, and provided him with a wife to share his joys and sorrows. All reproduction, in the natural order of things, on this earth is by sexual intercourse. If sexual intercourse be 'evil,' then the whole Law of Nature stands condemned. 'Where is Evil then?'—asks St. Augustine in his perplexity—whence and how did it come? 'What is its root and what is its seed? Or hath it no being? Why then fear we and avoid what is not? . . . Whence is it then, seeing God, the Good, hath created these lesser goods, still both Creator and created all are good?' This condemnation of natural means seems, as Bentham said, 'the greatest accusa-

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tion that can be upon the Maker of all good things. If they be not to be used, why did God make them?'¹ No satisfactory answer has ever been given to this question.

St. Paul, that enemy of woman and of marriage, was led into strange contradictions on this topic. His advice to people, if they were single, was to remain so. If they felt they must marry, *tant pis*, but let them be warned they might expect tribulations in the flesh which he would like to spare them. Yet he warned his followers that in the later days 'seducing spirits and doctrines of devils shall forbid people to marry.'

'Concerning virgins,' he had, he said, 'no commandment of the Lord,' nor did he enforce celibacy on priests, for he states that a Bishop should be 'the husband of one wife.'

The ideal of celibacy is, in fact, to live while yet in the body as if the body did not exist, or, anyhow, to punish it, subjugate it, and restrain it, as being an evil hindrance,

¹ *Table Talk of Jeremy Bentham*, p. 120. (Routledge's New Universal Library.)

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obtruding itself between the Spirit and its Maker. When we see how difficult of attainment this ideal was even for men of fine intellect and burning religious devotion like St. Augustine, Abelard, and St. Paul, we can realise the futility of trying to enforce it as a universal rule on the clergy.

In the early days¹ of Christianity it was not demanded of them. Christ, in his teaching, had shown a perfectly different spirit towards women from what was then prevalent. He opened the gates of the Kingdom of Heaven to men and women alike. 'For the first time woman was regarded as a creature equal to man.' But 'under the influence of a misunderstood and wrongly-applied Gospel marriage was debased, and the position of woman lowered by several degrees.'¹

The old prejudices and theories in regard to her inherent inferiority and uncleanness, and the consequent danger of sexual intercourse prevailed, and in the fourth century chastity

¹ Jean Finot, *Préjugé et Problème des sexes*, pp. 92, et seq. (Librairie Felix Alcan. Third edition.)

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was enjoined on all, and celibacy was laid down as a rule for the priesthood.

Hepworth Dixon suggests that this doctrine, like that of the Immaculate Conception, had its origin in Spain, that ‘bastard daughter of the East.’ In all Eastern religions, such as the Chaldean, Indian, Brahmin and Buddhist, and among Essenic Jews, the doctrines of asceticism and renunciation were enjoined. It was from the East that these ideas found their way into Spain, and in 305 she first enforced celibacy on her priesthood. From thence it passed into Italy, *via* Gaul, where it led to endless warfare, disputes, and contradictions—the Gothic spirit of the North (where women were held in much higher esteem) being always opposed to the notion.¹

The result of such a demand, made upon men who were not spiritually inclined to it, was just what we might expect. ‘The influence of the ascetic doctrine of the Church was in fact quite contrary to its aspiration.

¹ W. Hepworth Dixon, *Spiritual Wives*, vol. ii., chap. xxvii.

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The institution of clerical celibacy lowered the estimation of virtue by promoting vice.’¹

Moreover, this enforced celibacy defeated its own ends in other ways than by increasing the very evil it hoped to extinguish. A suppression of the natural instincts was considered desirable in order that it might lead to peace of mind by releasing the spirit from the toils of desire, and leaving it free to contemplate the spiritual. In many cases the very reverse result obtained. St. Augustine admitted that the war between his natural warm-hearted impulses and what he considered his duty left him ‘miserable.’ Abelard wrote to his friend Philintus, ‘I am thoroughly wretched.’ ‘Suffer me,’ he wrote to Heloïse, ‘to seek ease in my duty: though difficult it is to procure it. I pass whole days and nights alone in this cloister without closing my eyes.’²

Again, it must be admitted that restraint is morally valueless unless imposed from within,

¹ Westermarck, *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*, vol. ii., chap. xlii. p. 432.

² *Love Letters of Abelard and Heloïse*. (‘Temple Classics’ Edition.)

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and to impose a rule which is a direct defiance of natural law on a large number of human beings who have not the moral, mental, or physical control necessary to carry it out, is in the highest degree not only ridiculous, but dangerous. All unnatural renunciation brings its punishment, just as surely as unnatural excess. What is more, 'he to whom the aim of life is life knows there is immoral asceticism just as there is immoral sexual passion—immoral because it is not uplifting to humanity or the individual.'¹

The result of imposing this arbitrary law of unnatural restraint on men who were not spiritually inclined to it led to the most disgraceful licence in the Church. Although celibacy was first enforced on the Christian clergy in the fourth century, they were permitted to keep concubines as late as the eleventh century. During the whole of this period a furious controversy raged on the subject. Texts were twisted and turned inside

¹ Ellen Key, *Love and Ethics*, p. 56. (G. P. Putnam's Sons, London, 1912.)

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out to convey this, that, and the other meaning, and as arguments both for and against the enforcement of the ordinance. As the result of a Council at Rheims, 1119 A.D., all commerce with concubines and wives was positively forbidden under very severe penalties, and finally, in 1215, clerical celibacy was rigidly enforced at a Lateran Council. That these canons failed of achieving their object is only what we might expect. In the twelfth century, the Church having discovered a new method of adding to her income, a disgraceful traffic was started, whereby some prelates regularly sold permissions to sin. In the thirteenth century the Bishop of Liège had as many as sixty-five illegitimate children. 'Deprive the Church of honourable marriage and you fill her with concubinage, incest, and all manner of vice and uncleanness,' says a sermon written in the twelfth century.¹ The history of the Church in the Middle Ages is a justification of this statement.

In the twelfth century, Abelard writes that

¹ See Lea, *History of Sacerdotal Celibacy*.

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‘the scandalous debaucheries of the monks’ obliged him to banish himself from the cloister whither he had retired, and again, of his monks in Brittany he says that they are ‘known only for their dissoluteness and live without any rule or order.’¹

‘In the world we live in,’ wrote Erasmus in the sixteenth century, ‘the celibates are many and the chaste are few. A man is not chaste who abstains only because the law commands him, and such of our modern clergy as keep themselves out of mischief do it more from fear of the law than from conscience. They dread losing their benefices or missing promotions.’² The morals in convents were no better ; to take the veil was ‘equivalent to becoming a public prostitute.’³

That the practices at the present day of the Church of Rome—which still enforces celibacy on her priests—are different from her precepts will be illustrated by the following

¹ See Letter to Philintus, *Love Letters of Abelard and Heloise*.

² See *Life and Letters of Erasmus*. (J. A. Froude.)

³ See Lea, *History of the Inquisition*.

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incident. ‘Many Filipino priests have a personal lot and share in the costumbre under discussion [*i.e.* temporary contract between a man and a Filipino woman, to be terminated when expedient] either in its less or more revolting form. Their grown-up children bear witness to the long continuance of the custom. I know one old priest who lives openly with his Filipino wife—for that is what she really is—and family in the town where he has served, if my memory is accurate, for more than half a century. I have no reason to suppose that his ministrations are not acceptable to his flock—and yet the common folk believe that a lawfully wedded priest would *ipso facto* be incapacitated for the priestly office.’¹ The moral point of view illustrated by this incident is very reminiscent of that of the Middle Ages, which we have attempted to describe, when ‘from a worldly point of view it was better for Abelard, as a Churchman, to have the reputation of shameless

¹ Mrs. Mackirdy and W. N. Willis, *The White Slave Market*, 1912, p. 199.

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immorality than that of a loving and pious husband ; and this was so evidently a matter of course that she (Heloïse) willingly sacrificed everything and practised every deceit, that he might be considered a reckless libertine, who had refused her the only reparation in his power. Such was the standard of morals created by the Church and such were the conclusions inevitably drawn from them.’¹

We see by the failure of the attempt to impose by force a so-called ‘moral’ law, how such methods defeat their own aim, and how, in professing to follow Christ’s teaching concerning ‘morality,’ ‘everything that Christ hated most had been accepted, systematized, and authoritatively taught.’ For if there was one service to mankind which Christ sought to render it was in the investing of morality ‘with an atmosphere of freedom,’² and by substituting an inner for an outward moral control.

The widest possible gulf exists between the enforcement of this arbitrary rule of

¹ Lea, *History of Sacerdotal Celibacy*, p. 283.

² *The Creed of Christ*, chap. vi., p. 171, and chap. v., p. 142.

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celibacy, and the self-imposed celibacy of the Saint, who renounces all earthly loves that he may enjoy more complete union with the spiritual. Selfishness implies isolation, Love implies a burning desire for union with the object beloved. The law of Celibacy denied man the happiness of earthly union without ensuring him the happiness of a spiritual one. In theory, perhaps, the priestly heart should be wholly set upon the Unseen, but in reality such concentration is rare. Therefore, when under compulsion he is denied natural vents for his impulses and emotions, man seeks for unnatural vents, with disastrous results.

As for the way of complete renunciation of earthly passions—‘that viewless path’ we are told is ‘scarce to be trod by man wearing the flesh.’ Very few men are perfect lovers, and it is infinitely more rare to find a perfect spiritual one. Moreover, a heavenly passion is not to be forcibly imposed any more than an earthly one.

The emotions of what we may call this spiritual courtship closely resemble those of

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earthly lovers. Man therein represents the passive element, as woman does in earthly unions, and in this capacity he seeks for union with the Heavenly Lover. The same longings and ardours are experienced, the same sense of temporary estrangement and doubts are endured, and the same ecstatic raptures felt when the desired union is accomplished. The realities of this experience no one can doubt who has read the writings of the great mystics on this subject.

‘Love often-times knoweth no bounds, but is fervent beyond all measure . . . Though weary, love is not tired; though pressed, it is not straitened; though alarmed, it is not confounded; but, as a lively flame and burning torch, it forces its way upwards and securely passes through all. If any man love, he knoweth what is the cry of this voice. For it is a loud cry in the ears of God, this ardent affection of the soul which saith, “My God, my Love, Thou art all mine, and I am all Thine.” Enlarge thou me in love, that, with the inward palate of my heart, I may

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taste how sweet it is to love, and to be dissolved, and as it were to bathe myself in thy love. Let me be possessed by love, mounting above myself, through excessive fervour and admiration . . .’ And here again is an example from Santa Teresa :

‘ A Soul in God hidden from sin,
What more desires for thee remain,
Save but to love, and love again,
And, all on flame with love within,
Love on, and turn to love again.’¹

In *L’Ornement des Noces Spirituelles de Ruysbroeck l’Admirable*, the whole course of this spiritual passion and union is described in language of surpassing beauty. In a chapter entitled ‘D’un combat Amoureux entre l’esprit de Dieu et notre esprit,’ he describes how, ‘en cette tempête d’amour . . . Dieu, par l’esprit Saint s’incline en nous, et par cela nous sommes attouchés dans l’amour. Et notre esprit par l’opération de Dieu et la force amative, se presse et s’incline en Dieu,

¹ Translation by Arthur Symons.

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et par celà Dieu est attouché. De ces deux contacts naît le combat de l'amour, en la rencontre la plus profonde ; et en cette visitation, la plus intime et la plus aigue qui soit, l'esprit est le plus profondément blessé de l'amour. Ces deux esprits, c'est-à-dire l'esprit de Dieu et notre esprit, s'éclairent et s'illuminent l'un l'autre, et chacun, d'eux montre sa face à l'autre. Celà fait, unanimement, s'efforcer les amants l'un en l'autre ; chacun d'eux exige de l'autre tout ce qu'il est, et celà fait se dissoudre les amants. L'attouchement de Dieu et ses dons, nos efforts amoureux et ce que nous rendons, entretiennent l'amour. Ce flux et ce reflux font déborder la fontaine de l'amour. Ainsi l'attouchement de Dieu et nos efforts amoureux deviennent un amour simple. Ici l'homme est possédé par l'amour, au point qu'il s'oublie lui-même, qu'il oublie Dieu, et qu'il ne peut rien qu'aimer. Ainsi l'esprit est brûlé dans le feu de l'amour, et entre si avant dans l'attouchement de Dieu, qu'il est vaincu en tous ses efforts, et s'anéantit en

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tous ses œuvres, et s'épuise et devient lui-même amour au-dessous de toute jonction, et possède le plus intime de sa création au-dessus de toutes les vertus; là où commencent et finissent toutes les œuvres des créatures. Voilà l'amour en soi, fondement de toutes les vertus.'¹

In reading these rapturous outpourings we are able to understand how it is that 'the greatest sinners' are convertible into 'the greatest saints.' They have usually been large and warm-hearted individuals, and the longing to love, their appreciation of physical beauty and pleasure, has led them into excesses. Comes a moment when such an one catches a glimpse of that higher love of which their earthly loves are emblematic, and renouncing his old loves and attractions for this new one, he becomes as whole-hearted a lover of the spiritual as he had formerly been of the earthly. The current of his devotion having been transferred, and

¹ *L'ornement des Noces Spirituelles de Ruysbroek l'Admirable*. Translated by Maeterlinck. Pages 260, 261.

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his capacity for loving largely turned to a more worthy object, the former 'sinner' is converted into a 'saint.'

'Every woman who has afterwards performed a brilliant achievement of love, who has become a great Christian character—like St. Bridget of Sweden, like St. Catherine of Siena, or like St. Teresa—has had the fire of great love in her soul; her blood has been on fire with the longing to serve the race with body and soul. And therefore also her charity had warmth in it, while the victims of so much other benevolence freeze like shorn sheep.'¹

We seldom, if ever, read of a miser or of a hater of his kind becoming a 'saint,' because this immense capacity for loving is not developed in him. If we love not our brother whom we have seen, how shall we love God whom we have not seen? Hence it is easy to understand why Christ said that the publicans and harlots would achieve perfection before

¹ Ellen Key, *Love and Marriage*. Translated by Arthur G. Chater. Chap. v., p. 182. (G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1912.)

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those who professed to have carried out the minutest instructions of the law. For is not love, whether for a divine or a human object—of which an egotistical Pharisee is incapable—the true fulfilling of the law?

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CHAPTER IV.

AS it is claimed for the Church that she sanctified the regard in which marriage was held, and that it is through her teaching that woman occupies a better position than in non-Christian countries, as the Church has undoubtedly vastly influenced the marriage customs of Europe, it would be interesting to know how she obtained this influence.

The whole history of the early spread of Christianity forms the most interesting reading. The ordinary mortal has but vague ideas on the subject. He appreciates, no doubt, that the Church had an uphill task before her, that she suffered martyrdom and opposition, but that the beautiful and idealistic teaching of Christ gradually gained hold over the barbarian mind and won it over from paganism. That he retains these ideas regarding the origins of Christianity must be due to the fact

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that the truth on this subject is suppressed in his youthful lessons, and that later on he is not sufficiently interested to investigate what really happened.

The first successes of Christianity were undoubtedly due to the fact that the old religious forms had fallen into decay, and that the world was waiting for a new and vital religion, a need which Christianity supplied. The earliest Christians found themselves in a small and despised minority, and they proceeded to avail themselves of every means, temporal and other, that offered. No doubt their early courage, devotion and unworldliness were admired—as they deserved to be—and they gained many converts; but after the conversion to Christianity of the Roman Emperor Constantine, numbers joined the Church from purely interested motives, because it was under the imperial protection, and they hoped to gain favour thereby. As her power increased, the Church's methods for conversion began to be compulsory instead of persuasive—the reign of Force succeeded to the reign of Love.

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As early as in the fourth century (379 A.D.) Paganism was rendered illegal in the Roman Empire, and those who failed to conform to the new religion were branded as infamous heretics. By degrees, Pagans were excluded from military and judicial offices, and in fact from all posts of honour. In the following century, exile and confiscation of property was the reward dealt out to those who still retained the courage of their old opinions. 'We can conceive no wider gulf between two ideas or principles than that which separates the disciple of the first century, gladly taking up his Cross to follow Christ, from the terrorised proselyte of the fifth or sixth century, accepting baptism as an alternative to banishment and the loss of all that he possessed.'¹

Pope Gregory the Great ordered peasants to be starved, slaves to be chastised, freedmen to be tortured and imprisoned if they refused conversion. Then, again, bribery was resorted

¹ Rev. W. Hobhouse, *The Church and the World in Idea and in History*. Bampton Lectures, 1909, Lecture III., p. 108.

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to. Moreover, as converts were often baptized wholesale without any previous instruction, the new religion and paganism got hopelessly mixed up. It is impossible here to follow the entire progress of Christianity in Europe, but finally, the Church—having allied herself to and identified herself with temporal power, and claiming universal spiritual power in addition—tyrannised over both the minds and bodies of what we can only call her ‘subjects.’ The Church made use of the world, and the world was often ‘only too glad that the Church should serve her in the capacity of moral policeman.’¹

That this tyranny did not result in moral benefit to the world is proved by the fact that the external triumph of Christianity was coincident with the beginning of the period historically known as the ‘Dark Ages.’ Art certainly flourished during these centuries, but they were notorious for licence and for evil morals, and in fact for the triumph of every-

¹ Rev. W. Hobhouse, *The Church and the World in Idea and in History*. Bampton Lectures, 1909. Lecture IV., p. 158.

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thing that the Church professed to abhor, and the temporary extinction of all that she professed to worship.¹

The esteem in which marriage, legalised or otherwise, is held is of the highest importance to the welfare of mankind. The deep significance of the marriage act is recognised amongst the most primitive races, where it is often accompanied by the queerest ceremonies. Sexual relations and sexual processes, as all human relations and human processes, are religious to the primitive mind. . . . Even the ordinary intercourse of man with woman has for primitive man this religious meaning.² Celibacy, as we have seen, is by him regarded as a contemptible state—savages marry early, hence there is no cause for illicit unions. Prostitution, which is so freely countenanced and practised in Christian countries, is, when explained to them, regarded with abhorrence. That the condition of women

¹ For evidence of these facts see Bampton Lectures for 1909, Nos. II., III., IV.

² Ernest Crawley, *The Mystic Rose*, chap. i., pp. 5 and 6. (Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1902.)

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in savage tribes leaves a vast deal to be desired is no doubt true; the same may be said of the condition of many women in highly civilised countries. Nevertheless 'we have reason . . . to believe that the authority which savage husbands possess over their wives is not always quite so great as it is supposed to be. And we must distinctly reject as erroneous the broad statement that the lower races in general hold their women in a state of complete subjection. Among many of them, the married woman, though in the power of her husband, is known to enjoy a remarkable degree of independence, to be treated by him with consideration, and to exercise no small influence upon him. In several cases she is stated to be his equal and in a few his superior.'¹

Again, says Professor Westermarck, 'even such rude savages as the Bushmans, Fuegians, Andaman Islanders, and Australian aborigines seem often to be lovingly attached to their

¹ Westermarck, *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*, vol. i., chap. xxvi., p. 638.

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wives.’¹ It is an error, also, to suppose that they are compelled to marry against their own inclinations: ‘Among the lower races the women are allowed great liberty of choice.’²

Although in some primitive tribes there may be licence as to sexual intercourse, promiscuity is not and never has been practised. The attitude of savages in regard to the punishment of seducers is indeed morally in advance of that of modern civilised countries, since it is upon the seducer rather than upon the victim that they inflict punishment, sometimes of a very severe nature.³

Then again, if they are polygamous, at least they feel no shame on the subject, and, unlike the inhabitants of Christian countries, are guilty of no hypocrisy in professing monogamy, but actually indulging in plural unions of different varieties. In fact, primitive peoples do not oppose Nature, and are

¹ Westermarck, *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*, vol. i., chap. xxiii., p. 532.

² Westermarck, *History of Human Marriage*, chap. xxii., p. 277.

³ See Westermarck’s *History of Human Marriage*, chap. iv.

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singularly free from the self-consciousness prevalent among the civilised races of to-day, for, though they do not profess to be modest, they are so in fact. 'Nothing is so moral and so unlikely to excite the passions as nudity.' In this country, where we profess to hold modesty in great estimation, clothing, or the partial absence of it, is purposely designed as an incentive to excite passion.

To quote again from Professor Westermarck: 'The number of uncivilised peoples among whom chastity, at least as regards women, is held in honour and as a rule cultivated, is very considerable.' He adds that the lowering of morals amongst them has too often been caused by association with people of a professedly higher culture—*i.e.*, to their association with the white races and their introduction by them to immorality and drink.¹ With regard to the adoption of monogamy and polygamy, this is very largely determined, not by the influence of moral

¹ See Westermarck's *History of Human Marriage*, chap. iv.

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principles, as might be supposed, but by the conditions of life in different countries.

Monogamy is the natural outcome of a more advanced civilisation. As men become more educated and refined, it is not the primal instincts and passions alone that make their appeal, sympathy (which is the result of mental attributes and the source of true companionship leading to the sharing of interests and tastes) also plays a powerful part. Moreover, it survives after the decay of physical charms. Therefore, to find polygamy practised amongst the less and monogamy amongst the more highly evolved races is only what we might expect.

But an outward profession of monogamy and of a hatred of promiscuity, combined with the actual practice of what amounts to polygamy and of widespread prostitution has been the result of a too rigid enforcement of monogamy by law. Lawful marriage is indeed 'quite a different thing from a marriage in the natural history of the term.'

In Europe, among the Romans and the

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Frankish and Germanic peoples, marriage was held, before the invasion of 'Christian' ideas, in high esteem. Regarding the Teutonic peoples, 'the Roman testimonies to their purity of life are familiar.'¹

Of these Northern tribes Sir Walter Scott in his *Essay on Chivalry* wrote that they possessed 'even in their rudest state, so many honourable and manly distinctions over all the other nations in the same stage of society. The chaste or temperate habits of these youths, and the opinion that it was dishonourable to hold sexual intercourse until the twentieth year was attained, were in the highest degree favourable not only to the morals and health of the ancient Germans, but must have contributed greatly to place their females in that dignified and respectable rank which they held in society. . . . Polygamy and all its brutalising consequences . . . were happily unknown to our Gothic ancestors. . . . They were led to

¹ Rev. Oscar D. Watkins, *Holy Matrimony*, chap. vii., p. 410. (Rivington, Percival & Co., 1895.)

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regard themselves, not as the passive slaves of pleasure, but as the objects of a prolonged and respectful affection, which could only be finally gratified when their lovers had attained the age of mature reason and were capable to govern and to defend the family which should arise around them. . . . The minds of the participants became united before the joining of their hands, and a moral union preceded the mere intercourse of the sexes. The marriages formed under these wise auspices were, in general, happy and affectionate.' 'Adultery,' says Tacitus, 'was infrequent, and punished with the utmost rigour; nor could she who had undergone the penalty of such a crime find a second husband, however distinguished by beauty, birth and wealth. . . . No one then,' says the Roman historian, 'dared to ridicule the sacred union of marriage, or to term an infringement of its laws a compliance with the manners of the age. . . .' German women were capable of exercising the supreme authority in their tribe, and of holding the honours of the

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priesthood. It was held, so Tacitus relates, 'that there resides in the female sex something sacred and capable of presaging the future; nor do they scorn their advice or neglect their responses. . . .' Nor were their rights less extensive than their authority. The 'character of veneration, sanctity, and inviolability attached to the female character, together with the important part assigned to them in society,' were brought by the Gothic tribes from their native forests, and had existence long before the chivalrous institutions in which they made so remarkable a feature.¹

It is true that marriage by purchase prevailed amongst the Germans before their conversion to Christianity, yet all these races, 'by a slow process of evolution, had come to regard marriage as the most intimate, the most important, and the most venerable of all partnerships, in which husband and wife were equal partners. Being based upon consent and affection alone, that partnership could be

¹ See Sir Walter Scott, *Essay on Chivalry*.

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dissolved by the dissent of the parties when affection had turned into aversion, without the necessity of having to disclose the secret causes of their dissension and without having to prosecute each other before a public tribunal.¹ Moreover, in Roman days no public ceremony was considered necessary for marriage, since it was 'formed by the intention of the parties, of which the best evidence was living together as man and wife.'²

'Married women generally had a respected and influential position in the family,' says Professor Westermarck. 'To compel an unwilling party to remain married was as unthinkable to the Romans as to compel an unwilling party to enter marriage;'³ yet, though the conditions for divorce were so easy, 'though a Roman husband could repudiate his wife at will, it was said that for five hundred and twenty years *a condita urbe*

¹ S. B. Kitchin, *A History of Divorce*, chap. xii., p. 254.

² *Ibid.*, chap. i., p. 5.

³ *Ibid.*, chap. i., p. 5.

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there was no such thing as a divorce in Rome.’¹

‘The evidence which we possess as to the position of women in Rome is fairly contradictory,’ says another writer on the subject, yet ‘that noble definition of marriage, as a *mise en commun* of all human and divine rights, as an association in all the concerns of life, evinces the respect which attached to woman as one who should be a completion of man.’² Broadly speaking, the Roman marriage laws were based upon ‘the purity and integrity of family life.’

As regards the actual marriage ceremony, even nowadays in England ‘many worthy people, ignorant of history, confound the divine origin of marriage with the performance of the nuptial rite by a clergyman.’³ They confuse the act of marriage with the religious or legal ceremony associated with

¹ Westermarck, *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*, vol. i., chap. xxvi., p. 653.

² Jean Finot, *Préjugé et Problème des Sexes*, chap. i., pp. 77, 78.

³ J. F. Nisbet, *Marriage and Heredity*, chap. iii., p. 46.

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it, and a marriage is no marriage to them unless sanctified by the Church or the Law. It might be a surprise to them to know that for several centuries after Christ there was no religious marriage ceremony for Christians. 'The benediction of the priest was not for many centuries required by either the ecclesiastical or the secular law as a condition of valid marriage.'¹ To suggest that a marriage is no marriage unless it be sanctioned by a religious ceremony is as ridiculous as it would be to inform a man who had partaken of a good hearty meal that it was not a meal because he had failed to say grace before partaking of it.

It is by the ideas and teaching of Christianity that the general existing attitude towards marriage and the laws governing it have been dictated. It has only been of recent years that men have begun to emancipate themselves from the control of these ideas and the principles which they entailed,

¹ Rev. Oscar D. Watkins, *Holy Matrimony*, chap. vi., p. 99.

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and although there are signs everywhere of this emancipation, yet the mass of the people, who dislike all forms of innovation because of the thought involved, still cling to the old ideas. Let us examine the claim made on behalf of Christianity that it idealised the regard in which marriage was held, and vastly improved the position of woman.

Theoretically, it is true, we hear great talk of the 'sanctity of marriage' in modern 'Christian' countries to-day; but in practice, as we shall show, that sanctity has been to a vast extent totally disregarded, and even by implication denied. What has Christianity in effect accomplished towards the sanctification of marriage and the uplifting of woman? What is the evidence of authorities upon this subject? Any study of the Church's attitude towards marriage must necessarily include her attitude towards woman, since the one involves the other.

During the early centuries of Christianity, writes S. B. Kitchin, 'the status of woman was exceedingly lowered.' During the suc-

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ceeding centuries, known as the Dark Ages, which were coincident with the supreme authority of the Church in Europe, 'the affections, wishes, and welfare of mankind were crushed in a terrible machine of spiritual and temporal power.'¹

'In the first three centuries I have not been able to see that Christianity had any favourable effect on the position of women, but, on the contrary, that it tended to lower their character and contract the range of their activity,' wrote Principal Donaldson in the *Contemporary Review*.²

'The remarkable liberty granted to married women under the Roman Law,' writes Professor Westermarck, 'was only a passing incident in the history of the family in Europe. From the very first Christianity tended to narrow it.'³ Again, 'The real cause

¹ S. B. Kitchin, *A History of Divorce*, chap. ii.

² Principal Donaldson, 'The Position of Women among the Early Christians,' *Contemporary Review*, vol. lvi., 1889, p. 433.

³ Westermarck, *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*, vol. i., chap. xxvi., p. 653.

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of the improvement in woman's position is not the influence of Christianity, but that the occupations of women have become much more extensive ; their influence has expanded correspondingly, from the home and household to public life. Their widened interests have interfered with that submissiveness which is an original characteristic of their sex. Their greater education has made them more respected and has increased their independence. Finally, the decline of the influence exercised by antiquated religious ideas is removing what has probably been the most persistent cause of the wife's subjection to her husband.'¹

Another writer's opinion is that 'there is no more painful spectacle in history than the attitude maintained by the Church towards marriage during the first ten centuries of the Christian era . . . The polluting influence of passion was not thought to be redeemed by marriage. All intercourse between the sexes was discountenanced. It was taught that to

¹ Westermarck, *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*, vol. i., chap. xxvi., p. 669.

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have children under any circumstances was a sin, as it only supplied food for death, and that woman was an instrument of sin.'¹ The Christians even held the belief that the world had enough of children, and was fully stocked, and that every birth was a cause of sorrow and not of joy.² The mediæval Church passed decrees forbidding women 'to approach the altar or touch the Eucharist,' and it was even declared to be 'doubtful whether married persons cohabiting with each other could be saved'—woman having been declared to be 'in some sort an unclean thing, or at the best but a necessary evil.'³

The views of St. Paul towards marriage are well known. It is true he had decreed that marriage should be held in honour among all, yet his own views upon it did not tend to increase the esteem of his admirers for it. To the unmarried and to widows he said that

¹ J. F. Nisbet, *Marriage and Heredity*, chaps. iii. and iv.

² Principal Donaldson, 'The Position of Women among the Early Christians.' *Contemporary Review*, vol. lvi., 1889.

³ J. F. Nisbet, *Marriage and Heredity*, chaps. iii. and iv.

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it would be good for them to remain single, like himself—‘but if they have not continency let them marry,’ he added, ‘for it is better to marry than to burn.’ In a choice of evils he regards marriage as the lesser of the two—not a very lofty or ennobling attitude towards marriage for one of the great pillars and leaders of the Christian Church. The instincts of nature towards reproduction he regarded as a ‘law of sin,’ and he continually laid stress on the conflict going on between this law and the law of God. The only escape from such a conflict is ‘to mortify’ (*i.e.* to make die) ‘the deeds of the body.’

Christian writers of the second and third centuries regarded marriage, ‘even for the sake of children,’ as a ‘carnal indulgence, and such thinkers could not help feeling that the arrangement of the Creator was not altogether satisfactory. They did not venture on saying this. They did not dare to condemn marriage. But they held that it was much better not to marry at all; that the man or woman who had never married, but remained pure, was a

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nobler and more exalted being than the man or woman who had married.’¹

Amongst the early Fathers the most conflicting opinions were held regarding marriage. As to the low esteem in which woman was held by them, they appear to have been fairly unanimous. ‘Man was a human being made for the highest and noblest purposes; woman was a female made to serve only one. She was on the earth to inflame the heart of man with every evil passion. She was a fire-ship continually striving to get alongside the male man-of-war to blow him up into pieces.’ This is the way in which Tertullian addresses women: ‘Do you not know that each one of you is an Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age; the guilt must of necessity live too. You are the devil’s gateway; you are the unsealer of that forbidden tree,’ and so on. ‘Nothing disgraceful is proper for man, who is endowed with reason,’ writes Clement of Alexandria, ‘much

¹ Principal Donaldson, ‘The Position of Women among the Early Christians.’ *Contemporary Review*, vol. lvi., 1889.

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less for woman, to whom it brings shame even to reflect of what nature she is.’¹ According to Gregory of Tours, at the Council of Mâcon, held towards the end of the sixth century, a bishop even raised the question whether woman was really a human being. He answered the question in the negative; but the majority of the assembly considered it to be proved that woman, in spite of all her defects, was yet a member of the human race.²

A few examples of the differing opinions held by the early Fathers as to remarriage after the death of husband or wife may be interesting. They are taken from a book entitled *Holy Matrimony*, by the Rev. Oscar D. Watkins.

Athenagoras regarded them as ‘distinctly unlawful.’

St. Clement of Alexandria as ‘a concession to infirmity.’

¹ Principal Donaldson, ‘The Position of Women among the Early Christians.’ *Contemporary Review*, vol. lvi., 1889.

² Westermarck, *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*, vol. i., chap. xxvi., p. 653. (His authority is Gregory of Tours, *Historia Francorum*, vol. viii., p. 20.)

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Tertullian as 'sin.'

At the Council of Laodicea, second marriages 'might be condoned after a brief period of prayer and fasting.'

St. Epiphanius said they might 'be tolerated.'

St. Chrysostom wrote: 'As marriage is admirable, but virginity is superior to it, so second marriage is admirable, but first and only marriage is superior to it.'

St. Jerome, on the other hand, wrote that 'remarriage . . . was better than sin, and that was all that could be said for it.' Therefore, let a young widow 'who cannot or will not contain, accept a husband rather than the devil.' Again, he describes a widow's remarriage as 'a dog returning to its vomit, and a washed sow returning to its wallowing place.'¹ Accordingly, marriage, which was at one time pronounced 'pollution' by the Church, at another was declared to be a 'Sacrament' (*i.e.*, 'the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace') in

¹ S. B. Kitchin, *A History of Divorce*, chap. ii., p. 21.

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order that the Pope might obtain exclusive jurisdiction over it. The Church, having obtained complete jurisdiction over marriage, appointed herself a 'judge and decider of cases, and permitted divorce upon grounds not supported by Scriptural authority.'¹ She also invented impediments to it—relationships, physical and what she styled 'spiritual,' in order to have the opportunity of selling dispensations. 'Good God!' wrote Luther, 'it is horrible to look upon the temerity of the tyrants of Rome, who thus, according to their own caprices, at one time annul marriages and at another time enforce them.'²

At the Council of Arles it was laid down that after divorce 'an innocent husband may not re-marry.'

Lactantius decided 'that a man who puts away his wife for adultery may marry again.'

St. Ambrose and St. Augustine, on the other hand, did not admit marriage after divorce. According to St. Innocent I., 're-

¹ S. B. Kitchin, *A History of Divorce*, chaps. iii., iv., v.

² Luther's Primary Works. *Of Matrimony*.

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marriage on both sides is adultery.' According to St. Asterius, adultery severed marriage; while according to St. John Chrysostom there was 'no escape from the bondage of it.' In the writings of Theodoret, while one passage favours re-marriage, another excludes it.¹

Again, concubinage would be strictly forbidden by one Pope; by another it was declared to be no sin.

What was the morality of the clergy and of monastic orders in the Middle Ages we have already seen, and as they were to set an example of living, we may imagine what were the morals of the laity. 'Woman's position, as the result of the Church's interference, was either complete subjection to a husband, from whom she had to tolerate every form of indignity and cruelty, or to take the veil, which was equivalent to becoming a public prostitute.' Wives were even commanded to continue living with husbands afflicted with loathsome diseases.'²

¹ Rev. Oscar D. Watkins, *Holy Matrimony*, chap. vii.

² S. B. Kitchin, *A History of Divorce*, chaps. iii., iv., v.

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All these differing views held on the subjects of marriage and of divorce were the outcome of different interpretations placed upon Scriptural texts. That even to-day no definite conclusion has been arrived at is made apparent by the opinions expressed on the Committee appointed to inquire into a reform of the Marriage Laws.

In regard to the principle of indissolubility the writers of this Report say, 'We think that it is important that we should state the views of theologians and scholars who have been called before us, in order to assist in arriving at a conclusion as to the attitude which should be adopted by the State. It will be observed that upon this main question there are wide differences of opinion. In the evidence given before us, opinions were maintained in favour of each of the following principles:

'That all marriages are indissoluble.

'That all Christian marriages are indissoluble.

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‘That marriage is dissoluble on the ground of adultery only.

‘That marriage is dissoluble on the grounds of (1) adultery, or (2) desertion.

‘That marriage is dissoluble on other serious grounds, based upon the necessities of human life.’

Hence we have opinions so widely diverging as that of Canon Hensley Henson (now Dean of Durham), who considers ‘that the conditions of divorce are properly to be determined in the light of Christian principle, with reference to the actual necessities and circumstances of men, and that Christ’s words in St. Matthew and St. Mark are not legislative,’ and that of Monsignor Moyes, Canon of the arch-diocese of Westminster, who considers that a Christian marriage has the ‘paramount and immutable character of Divine law, and is absolutely indissoluble, except by the death of either party.’¹

If it be true that, ‘when once the voice

¹ *Report of the Royal Commission on Divorce and Matrimonial Causes*, 1912, pp. 30, 31.

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of the Church has become divided, its use as an authority would seem to be necessarily gone,'¹ then the Church's use as an authority on matters relating to marriage and divorce has never existed. At all events, the whole history of the Church in regard to the interpretation of texts bearing on marriage, and on sexual relations, goes to prove the absolute futility of such texts as authorities for conduct. They mean one thing to one person, something entirely different to another; and that each theologian claims his interpretation to be the only authentic one is no help whatever. To some followers of Christ it is deduced from his sayings that he laid stress on the sanctity and inviolability of marriage. To others, equally devoted, it appears that 'Christ, not only never instituted marriage, but taking the definitions into account rather negatived it. "Leave thy wife and follow me" . . .' Again, 'It is open to us not to accept the doctrine of Christ, this doctrine with which

¹ Dr. George Serrell, 'The High Church Doctrine as to Marriage and Divorce.' *Contemporary Review*, vol. lxviii., p. 35.

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our whole life is permeated and on which all our morality is based ; but if we do accept it, we must admit that it implies an ideal of absolute chastity.' ¹

Even the Reformation did not do much to improve the regard in which woman was held. In some ways it rendered her position even worse, and the inconsistencies of the Reformers in the matter of morality and marriage were just as glaring as those of Rome.* They loudly condemned and rejected the enforcement of celibacy ; marriage they declared to be no sacrament, but a civil contract ; but, like the Church of Rome, the Reformers never consulted either the wishes or the welfare of the people for whom they legislated. In the matter of divorce, public opinion always con-

¹ Léo Tolstoi, *Postface à La Sonate à Kreutzer*, pp. 401, 404.

* 'Indeed it is difficult to see how the Father of Evil himself in his most inspired moments could have devised a means of placing marriage on a more degrading basis than that on which it was placed, of malice aforethought, by the great reformer. Those in our day, who talk so much about the "sacredness of marriage," can know but little about its history. Luther . . . reduced it to something little above a licensed sin.'—Mona Caird, *The Morality of Marriage*, 1897, part ii., p. 79.

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demned the wife and excused the man, 'no matter what the merits of the case might be.' Divorce was permitted by the Reformers for two or three causes, but Luther's opinion on the subject was that he detested divorce, and even preferred bigamy to it. 'Whether it be lawful,' he adds, 'I dare not define.' Again, in regard to the errors of Rome he said, 'There is no hope of a remedy, unless we can do away, once for all, with all the laws of men, call back the Gospel of liberty, and judge and rule all things according to it alone. Amen.' 'Let whosoever will be as holy and as zealous as he will, but let him not injure others or rob me of my liberty.'¹ Unfortunately, the Reformers themselves gave little evidence of their desire not to rob others of their liberty.

It is also claimed for the Church that she raised the position of woman by the homage rendered by her to the Mother of Christ and to many female 'saints.' It is true that homage, amounting to idolatry, has been rendered to the Mother of Christ, but it

¹ Luther's Primary Works.

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is as a Virgin and as a Mother—never as a wife—that she has been revered. Nor is the worship of a Virgin Mother peculiar to Christianity alone. The Greek goddess Aphrodite, for instance (the Astarte of the Phœnicians), was revered by the Romans as the ‘*Virgo Cœlestis*,’ the very title by which Mary is worshipped in the Catholic Church.¹ Nor is the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception peculiar to Catholicism alone. ‘There has evidently always been a deep feeling in the human race that the doctrine of the Fatherhood of God did not fully meet human needs or satisfy human yearning. Human beings, especially at moments of grief and anguish, crave for the sympathy, the gentleness, the tenderness of Motherhood. This gentleness, tenderness, sympathy, must in some way, men thought, reside in the Divine Being. The Roman Catholic Church endeavoured to meet the craving by enunciating the dogma of the Virgin Mother of God.’² In order to main-

¹ Salomon Reinach, *Orpheus*, chap. i., p. 39.

² George Barlow, *The Higher Love*, p. 54. (A. C. Fifield.)

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tain the reverence for Christ's Mother as a Virgin, theories were developed to account for his brothers and sisters, of whom 'the Gospels speak with great simplicity.' It was suggested that they were cousins, or children of Joseph by a former marriage.¹

The majority of the Saints whom the Catholic Church has elected to worship have been celibates — not mothers, but virgins. Where any of these had been married at any time, their sanctity was due to their having renounced their earthly unions, and some were widows. 'The Church was sometimes obliged to make choice of married men for her priesthood, because virgins or unmarried could not always be found : they, notwithstanding, lived ever after continent.'² Of SS. Julian and Basilissa, for example, we read that 'according to their acts . . . they, by mutual consent, lived in perpetual chastity,' although they had gone through the ceremony of marriage.³ It is also noticeable that although in Egypt

¹ Salomon Reinach, *Orpheus*, chap. viii., p. 224.

² Butler, *Lives of the Saints*. (Note to 'St. Hilary.')

³ *Ibid.*

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and in Greece there were priestesses serving in the temples, yet Christianity has never permitted women to serve in its churches in such a capacity. Thus we see that, although she professes to uphold the sanctity of marriage, 'the stigma attached by the Church to all that relates to the reproduction of the species is a fact of which the most enlightened Englishman of the present day is more or less conscious.'¹

It is also claimed that Chivalry, which is regarded as a Christian institution, did a great deal to raise the regard in which woman was held. 'At what remote period the forms of chivalry were first blended with those of the Christian religion, would be a long and difficult inquiry.' As Sir Walter Scott remarks, 'The Romish clergy, who have in all ages possessed the wisdom of serpents, if they sometimes have fallen short of the simplicity of doves,' saw the necessity of converting to their own uses the warlike spirit which animated the peoples of the North. Accordingly, they directed their martial zeal into a campaign against paganism.

¹ J. F. Nisbet, *Marriage and Heredity*, chap. iii., p. 48.

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‘The genius alike of the age and of the order tended to render the zeal of the professors of chivalry fierce, burning and intolerant,’ with the result that ‘the mixture of devotion in the military character of the knight degenerated into brutal intolerance and superstition in its practical effects,’ although ‘nothing could be more beautiful and praiseworthy than the theory on which it was grounded.’

With regard to the other feature of chivalric devotion—the devotion to woman—this, as already mentioned, was an inheritance from the Northern tribes, and certainly was not derived from the teachings of Christianity. Lofty as were the ideals of chivalry in its early days, they degenerated. ‘Extremes of every kind border on each other; and as the devotion of the knights of chivalry degenerated into superstition, the Platonic refinement and subtleties of amorous passion which they professed, were sometimes compatible with very coarse and gross debauchery. We have seen that they

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derived from the Gothic tribes that high and reverential devotion to the female sex . . . but with the simplicity of those ancient times they lost their innocence ; and woman, though still worshipped with enthusiasm as in the German forests, did not continue to be (in all cases, at least) the same pure object of regard. . . This licence was greatly increased by the Crusades, from which the survivors of these wild expeditions brought back the corrupted morals of the East, to avenge the injuries they had inflicted on its inhabitants.'

Courage and devotion to women were two strong characteristics which Christianity discovered in Northern Europe. By directing the channels into which these energies should flow, it hoped to further its own cause. The result of contact with Christianity seems to show that the very reverse occurred. The courage of the Crusaders degenerated into intolerance and cruelty, and the devotion of the knights of chivalry into the gross licence and debauchery of the Middle Ages. 'Nevertheless,' says Sir Walter Scott, 'we cannot

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doubt that the institutions of chivalry, virtuous as they were in principle, and honourable and generous in their ends, must have done much good and prevented much evil.' We must also acknowledge that the degrading attitude of Christianity towards women swamped the high regard in which they had been held by the Teutonic peoples, and that, in so doing, Christianity inflicted an immeasurable injury on the cause of civilisation and progress.

The whole attitude of the Church towards marriage is so singular as to be worthy of study.

It appears that the 'stigma' attaching to sexual union dates from 'the Fall.' What that 'fall' was we are not exactly told; but it appears that 'the sin of our first parents, which has been followed by such calamitous consequences, was not a sin of sexual appetite.'¹

Previous to the Fall, marriage was a 'pure

¹ Rev. Oscar D. Watkins, *Holy Matrimony*, chap iv., p. 29.

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and holy union.' Yet, as Dr. George Serrell points out in an article criticising this theory, the narrative of Genesis certainly suggests that the union of our first parents 'did not take place till after the expulsion from Paradise, to admit which would be, on Mr. Watkins's principles, to admit that marriage never occurred in the State of Innocence at all.'¹ As for marriage after 'the Fall,' we are informed 'it was not the pure and holy union of Eden, nor was it the Sacramental union of the redeemed. It was the permitted union of persons in a state of sin and death. It was therefore an union in which, as on the one hand, the fulfilment of the divine regulations with regard to marriage could not give to the estate itself the pure and holy character which rightly belonged to it, so on the other hand the disregard of those regulations, as in the cases of polygamy and divorce, could not transfer the persons from the state of grace into the state of sin, inasmuch as they were in

¹ Dr. George Serrell, 'The High Church Doctrine as to Marriage and Divorce.' *Contemporary Review*, vol. lxviii., 1895, p. 23.

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the state of sin already.’¹ Again, we read of marriage previous to the Christian era that ‘after the Fall . . . it was the marriage of persons in a state of sin, who, even if they maintained an union at once indissoluble and exclusively faithful, were yet incapable of the holiness of the marriage union, as it was possible either in the innocence of paradise or in the redeemed life of the members of Christ’²

Only by Christianity is marriage redeemed from this hopeless state of sin. The amazing doctrine is then put forward that ‘all marriages contracted between Christians and non-Christians are essentially null and void,’ and that, whereas marriages contracted within the Church’s fold are indissoluble, those ‘contracted outside Christianity are not essentially indissoluble,’ and that, ‘since the right to dissolve a marriage contracted outside Christianity is ultimately based upon the

¹ Rev. Oscar D. Watkins, *Holy Matrimony*, chap. iv., p. 27.

² *Ibid.*, chap. viii., p. 438.

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dissoluble character of such marriages, the expression of the will of the unbelieving partner may be dispensed with.’¹

In other words, the *sanctity of Christian marriage only is insisted upon*. This sanctity is imparted to it by its Christian character, without which it would rank as a ‘state of sin.’ Nevertheless, adds the writer, ‘holy though the estate of Christian marriage is, yet in its closest and most intimate union there must ever pass at least the shadow of a shame.’²

‘It is nothing short of a slander on Christianity to affirm that it treats this form of desire’ (*i.e.* sexual desire) ‘as something essentially shameful’³ wrote Canon Knox Little, some years ago. Nevertheless here we have the admission of an authority on Christian marriage that even in what he

¹ Rev. Oscar D. Watkins, *Holy Matrimony*, chap. viii., p. 589.

² *Ibid.*, chap. vi., p. 76.

³ Canon Knox Little, ‘Marriage and Divorce: the Doctrine of the Church of England.’ *Contemporary Review*, vol. lxxviii., p. 266.

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considers to be the highest and purest form of marriage possible on earth 'the shadow of a shame must rest.' Why it should be so he does not inform us, since, as we have already shown, he asserts that the Fall, which is responsible for this shadow of shame, had no connection with sexual matters.

For the result of the Catholic Church's teaching in regard to these matters the following evidence speaks for itself: 'The result of convent education is that many of the more emotional and sensitive of our Catholic girls become nuns themselves from sheer fright, as the easiest way of solving the horrible problem of life . . . presented to them. The ideas of convent-bred girls at the present time about men are shocking. Both in the confessional and in the convent they have been taught to take it for granted that all men are immoral.' Of these moral instructors of youth, the same author (himself a Catholic) writes that the inmates of convents to-day are 'the most deceived and degenerate section of the most degenerate

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people in North Europe or North America.’¹ So anxious has Christianity been to save souls from the perdition to which they are doomed by ‘original sin,’ that it has drawn a complete line of cleavage between man’s physical and his spiritual nature, between the ‘supernatural’ and the ‘natural.’ Fortunately, individual members of the Christian Churches, and of society generally in Christian countries, have held more ideal opinions regarding marriage than are warranted by the orthodox teachings of the Churches themselves. ‘Fortunately for the Western world, supernaturalism was but one side of Christianity. Christ himself was no anchorite, and his teaching, if exacting, was also tender. There have never been wanting individuals to show the world that it was possible to follow in his steps, and live externally the ordinary life of a commonplace citizen, while their souls within them are filled with their Master’s teaching and overflowed in charity

¹ Michael J. F. McCarthy, *Priests and People in Ireland*, chap. xxiv., pp. 427, 478. (Simpkin, Marshall, London, 1911.)

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to all mankind. It is here in the simple personal following of Christ that the strength of Christianity will always lie—not in the mazes of dogmatic theology, not in the spiritual machinery for drawing souls to God, not in the teaching of the Churches.’¹

¹ L. T. Hobhouse, *Morals in Evolution*, chap. ii., p. 159. (Chapman & Hall. 1906.)

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CHAPTER V.

ENOUGH has been said in the foregoing chapters to prove that the result of the doctrinal teaching of Christianity, far from tending to elevate the attitude of mankind towards marriage and to improve the position of women, has had a degrading influence.

The ascetic attitude of the Church towards marriage is to be condemned as being selfish, degrading, pharisaical, and hypocritical, contrary to the teaching of Christ, immoral, and at complete variance with natural laws.

It is *selfish*. The spiritual welfare of the individual himself is all that is considered. He strives after celibacy, or to maintain a disastrous union, in the hopes that, by mortifying the deeds of the body, he may save his soul. In his anxiety to become a worthy citizen of 'Heaven' he becomes a very indifferent citizen of earth.

In the words of Professor Westermarck,

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‘Most religions contain an element which constitutes a real peril to the morality of their votaries. They have introduced a new kind of duties—duties towards gods; and . . . even where religion has entered into close union with worldly morality, much greater importance has been attached to ceremonies or worship or the niceties of belief than to good behaviour towards fellow-men. People think that they may make up for the latter by orthodoxy or pious performances.’¹ Of Christianity, in its ascetic attitude, this is only too true. For good behaviour towards fellow-men includes a deep sense of responsibility towards the coming race and of parenthood generally, of which asceticism is practically the denial.

It is *degrading* in its conception of the body by regarding it as an enemy of the soul. It is futile to teach at one moment that the body of man is a temple of the Holy Ghost if at another it be asserted that all its tend-

¹ Westermarck, *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*, vol. ii., chap. lii., p. 736.

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encies are evil and must be repressed and mortified. If we regard the body as the temple of the divine spirit in man, and from that point of view only, if we realise that a healthy body is the first step towards a healthy mind, if from early days we are familiarised with its uses and functions, with the wonderful powers latent in it, if we realise our deep responsibilities towards future generations, and recognise ourselves to be a link in a chain the future strength of which depends largely on our morals and behaviour, our attitude in regard to the body will be a far more lofty one than if we take the ascetic view described above. Moreover, instead of dissipating our energies in trying to repress its natural instincts and functions, we shall use those energies in trying to perfect its uses for the benefit not of ourselves only, but of humanity in the future.

‘Somehow—though it is not quite clear how,’ writes Edward Carpenter, ‘this view of the importance of love to personal health has been sadly obscured in later and Christian

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times. The dominant Christian attitude converted love from being an expression and activity of the deepest human life and joy, into being simply a vulgar necessity for the propagation of the species. A violent effort was made to wrench apart the spiritual and corporeal aspects of it. The one aspect was belauded, the other condemned. Corporeal intercourse and the propagation of the race were vile necessities. True affection dwelt in the skies and disclaimed all earthly contacts. And yet all this was a vain effort to separate what could not be separated. It was like trying to take the pigments out of a picture ; to call the picture "good," but the stuff with which it was painted "bad."'¹

In the same connection the ascetic attitude is *at complete variance with natural laws*. To treat the body as a thing apart from and at variance with man's spiritual nature is to display a colossal ignorance of natural laws, for which at the present day

¹ Edward Carpenter, *The Drama of Love and Death*, chap. iii., p. 34. (George Allen & Co., Ltd., 1912.)

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there is absolutely no excuse. One who has had experience of police courts and prisons for twenty-five years and who has given to the study of the psychology of crime the most devoted study, founded at first hand upon this experience, has come to the following conclusion: 'I am ashamed to confess that I do not know where the physical ends and the psychological begins, for psychology is but extended physiology. The body acts upon the mind and the mind upon the body in so many and in such mysterious ways, that I cannot differentiate between them. But of one thing I am quite certain, and it is this: that the best way to learn something of a criminal's mind is to ascertain everything possible with regard to his body.'¹ He then proceeds to give the most illuminating figures in regard to the relation between crime and ill-health of mind and body. For instance: 'They tell us that for ten years they have in Pentonville prison

¹ Thomas Holmes, *Psychology and Crime*, chap. ii., p. 14. (J. M. Dent & Sons, 1912.)

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measured, weighed and medically examined all the young prisoners, *i.e.* all those under twenty-one years of age who have undergone sentences in that huge establishment.' What is the result? 'On an average they are two inches less in height and fourteen pounds less in weight than the average industrial population of similar ages; twenty-eight per cent. of them suffer from some physical disease or deprivation.'¹

So intimately are soul and body connected that they react continually the one upon the other. 'The body is under the influence of the soul; the soul under the influence of the body; desires are modified by ideas, and ideas by desires.'² 'Any attempt to separate morality from the influence of the physical senses, far from helping forward evolution only retards it, since—until a new order be appointed, given our present earthly conditions, the transference of love into another

¹ Thomas Holmes, *Psychology and Crime*, chap. ii., p. 21.

² Ellen Key, *De l'Amour et du Mariage*, p. 105.

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region than that of the physical senses will be an impossibility.'¹

A man with a healthy body is far more likely to have sane and healthy views of life than one whose mind is impaired by disease. No doubt this theory of the interdependence of the mind and body can be and has been carried to extremes, or rather people may be inclined to dwell exclusively on the influence the body has over the mind. A theory has been put forward to prove that the religious or non-religious mind is entirely the result of the formation of brain matter. No doubt there is often confusion between results and causes, but the discoveries of scientists and of those who have most carefully studied the human mind and body prove irrefutably that man's physical and spiritual natures are so intimately dependent the one upon the other, that it is futile, in relation to conduct, to consider them absolutely apart.

The attitude of Christianity is *immoral*—if morality be a high standard of right

¹ Ellen Key, *De l'Amour et du Mariage*, p. 21.

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behaviour towards ourselves and towards our fellow-men. By compelling couples to live together, when one of them suffers from insanity or drunkenness, or when one of them inflicts cruelty on the other, or compels the other to lead an immoral life, not only is the innocent partner bound to suffer spiritually, mentally and physically, but the effect is disastrous on their offspring.¹

The teaching of Christianity having resulted in the whole sexual question being regarded as of a shameful nature, young people are too often led into immorality through sheer ignorance of the most elementary facts, and young girls into marriage who are totally ignorant of its conditions and of the responsibilities of motherhood. So also the rigid marriage laws are directly responsible for a large number of illegal unions amongst people of naturally moral tendencies,² and for many immoral connections. Further reference will be made to prostitution and its causes.

¹ See *Report of the Divorce Commission*, 1912, pp. 99-113.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 41, 42.

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The attitude of the Church is *Pharisaical*. Like the Pharisees, the Church metaphorically pays tithes of mint, anise, and cummin, omitting the weightier matters of the law—of which *mercy* in particular is one. It strains at the gnat of a marriage ceremony and the meanings of doubtful texts, and swallows the camel of evils resulting from too literal interpretation thereof—prostitution, disease, and misery, physical and mental. It also leads its members to pass the harshest judgments on those who differ from them. To regard marriage unions outside the Church—however ideal in their character—as a ‘state of sin,’ and marriage solemnised by the Church—however disastrous—as ‘sacred,’ and therefore ‘indissoluble,’ is entirely contrary to the whole spirit of Christ’s teaching. If there was one thing that Christ insisted upon more than another, it was the value of inward motives as against outward observance of the letter of the law.

In view of the fact that his practice was to lay down broad ideals and to leave it to the

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individual to interpret them according to the measure of his own spiritual growth, it is highly doubtful whether he ever uttered the words regarding divorce and marriage over which so much theological conflict has raged since his death, and of which such entirely opposite interpretations have been given. Marriage is, to Churchmen, not the union of a man and woman, living together for 'mutual help and comfort,' and for the continuance of the race, but a religious ceremony performed in church, without which such union is to them null and void. Is it at all likely that Christ, who constantly showed his detestation of forms and ceremonies and legalisms and his appreciation of the motive and what we may call the 'inwardness' of conduct, would ever have sanctioned so ridiculous a theory?

Having considered the widespread influence hitherto exercised by religion in the regions of sexual morality, and having examined the attitude of the Christian Church towards the matter, and having condemned that attitude, we may now inquire, what

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claim has the Christian Church to regulate the marriage laws and the moral attitude of this country at the present time?

We may ask ourselves, on the evidence of the clergy themselves, what is the extent of religious influence in England to-day?

‘The masses,’ writes Bishop Talbot, ‘are not actively hostile to religion; they do not care enough about it to be hostile: they simply pass it by on the other side.’¹ ‘As the result of some inquiries made by the Bishop of London in certain large centres of labour, it was found that only one per cent. of workmen admitted that they belonged to any Christian body.’²

‘The very poor,’ writes the Rev. Richard Free, ‘are indifferent to religion on account of their fearful poverty.’ He speaks of ‘the failure of the Church to Christianise the lower classes.’³ ‘Throughout England and Wales I

¹ *Facing the Facts*, p. 2. (Macmillan & Co., 1912.)

² Rev. W. Hobhouse, *The Church and the World in Idea and in History*. Footnote to page 276.

³ *Facing the Facts*. Chapter entitled ‘The Very Poor,’ by the Rev. R. Free, p. 134.

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have found the working man generally cynical in his attitude towards the Anglican Church ; he is so little interested in it . . . ' is the experience of another clergyman. He adds : ' The overwhelming vote at Trade Union and Labour Party conferences in favour of secular education . . . spells indifference to dogma, or rather to certain dogmas, rather than hostility to religion.'¹

In Scotland, ' attendance at worship on the Lord's-day, even in country districts, where the Church held so strong a position in the life of the people, is not so regular as it used to be, and in the large towns and cities the falling away is much more marked.' The writer adds that ' the people have not ceased to believe in God or to reverence Christ. They still cling to the ancient landmarks, but the Church as an institution does not appeal to them in the old way.'²

In reference to the richer classes, we hear

¹ *Facing the Facts*. Chapter entitled ' Organized Labour,' by the Rev. Conrad Noël, pp. 100 and 111.

² *Ibid*. Chapter entitled ' Scotland,' by the Rev. D. MacMillan, pp. 231 and 249.

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that the 'new Squire' 'probably rarely attends in church because he does not feel any social obligation, and he is—perhaps rightfully—doubtful of how much good Church will do him.' Regarding the 'new Squire's son,' 'it is hard to talk about his religion, because it is non-existent.'¹

The middle classes, it appears, are less affected by the decline in public worship than either the rich or the very poor. 'It is natural to regard them as the religious pulse of the nation.' Yet for them also 'the pulpit is losing its influence as a moral and intellectual guide.' 'The Church has to deal with a church-going public that desires the respectability of religion, apart from its reality.'² *

¹ *Facing the Facts*. Chapter entitled 'The Upper Classes,' by the Rev. Lord William Gascoyne-Cecil, pp. 43, 50.

² *Ibid.* Chapter entitled 'The Middle Classes,' by H. G. Wood, M.A., pp. 56 and 75.

* See a Play by Brieux, called *The Three Daughters of M. Dupont*. The husband asks his wife if she has been to Mass? 'Julie: No. Antonin: Why not? Julie: It is not my fault if I no longer believe. Antonin: I don't ask you to believe. I ask you to go to Mass. The two things

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Very likely it is this idea of the 'respectability' associated with church-going that leads many people, who otherwise never attend at public worship, and who have no faith in Christian doctrines, to be married, and to have their children baptized according to Christian rites.

According to most of the writers quoted above, it appears, not that people are hostile to religion, but that they have lost faith in the Church. 'The student of contemporary religious life who institutes an inquiry into the state of religion in rural districts will probably come away with a general impression of failure, acknowledged freely by Churchmen, a trifle reluctantly by the Nonconformists. . . . Is religion really decaying?' Judging by the attendance at places of worship, it is. There is a falling-off all along the line. Yet

are totally different. A woman ought to go to Mass. If she doesn't believe, she should appear to do so. It is usual among people of good position. I wish you to do as others do. Do you understand? I wish it. I have no desire to pass for a Freethinker, when all my clients are Catholics, confound them!

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‘the most enthusiastic advocate of institutional religion could not assert that the decay of outward religion has been accompanied by any unusual outbreak of wickedness. There is a general consensus of opinion that villages are quieter and more decent places to live in than they were. . . . *An improvement in morality, accompanied by a decline in church attendance, this is our conclusion so far.** This introduces the great question of the relation of morality to religion, which cannot be discussed here.’¹

Again, ‘as to the question of personal purity or of loyalty to the marriage-tie, there is little or no sign of a serious breach in the Puritanism of the present generation. On this side the moral health of the middle classes does not seem to be failing as yet; the middle classes of the British Isles are still stricter moralists than their Continental equals.’²

The foregoing statements prove, if proof be

* The italics are mine.

¹ *Facing the Facts*. Chapter entitled ‘Country Districts,’ by the Rev. W. K. Lowther Clarke, pp. 161-163.

² *Ibid.* Chapter entitled ‘The Middle Classes,’ by H. G. Wood, M.A., p. 61.

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required, and on what will be considered good authority, that an apparent indifference to religious forms and an improvement in moral conditions are not incompatible.

It is not possible here to inquire fully into the causes of the diminishing influence of Christianity in this country, but it is highly probable that its reactionary attitude towards the great problems of marriage, of sexual morality, of heredity, and of parenthood is one of them. That its influence is diminishing day by day is well recognised inside the Church itself as well as outside it. 'Why is the Church, after having evangelised the West, and ruled it for a thousand years, allowing it to slide back into paganism? The answer to this question is that she herself is unwittingly paganising it. I mean by this that, without intending to do so, she is compelling it to choose between secularised life and arrested growth.'¹

'The various activities of the human spirit,

¹ Edmond Holmes, *What Is and What Might Be*, chap. i., p. 34.

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art, science, literature, law, statecraft, and the rest, have one and all freed themselves by slow degrees from ecclesiastical control, till little or nothing has been left for the Church to regulate but her own rites and ceremonies, and the morals, in a narrowing and ever narrowing sense of the word, and the faith (in the theological sense of the word) of the faithful.' ¹

Some years ago another well-known writer said: 'The language of the Prayer-book contains still the anathema on the senses; the baptismal and the marriage services are still the whitewashing of appetites, not conceived of as natural or right, but as in themselves carnal and evil. Our religion at present grapples with the senses alone by crushing them But how to blend the senses and the soul—that the Church does not show. It has no theory on the subject; it is exactly where St. Simeon Stylites or St. Bernard left it ages ago.' ²

¹ Edmond Holmes, *What Is and What Might Be*, chap. i., p. 28.

² Rev. H. R. Haweis, 'The New Clergy,' *Contemporary Review*, vol. lxviii., p. 606.

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Legally, marriage has already passed out of the Church's control. 'Marriage has ceased to be the province of the clergy and is regulated by Statute Law enacted by a lay Parliament and enforced by civil judges.'¹ That being so, it would be a good thing if churchmen would cease interfering with proposed legislation for the mass of the population, of whom a minority only are Christians in more than name. 'The Church must welcome and rejoice in all goodness and virtue wherever they are found; but she cannot legislate in the matter of marriage, any more than anything else, for other than her own members,' wrote Canon Knox Little in 1895, and we heartily endorse his view. If fresh legislation to facilitate divorce is passed, there is no compulsion on Christians to avail themselves of it. Only, as Martin Luther protested, let them not deprive others of their liberty. Those within the Church's fold are at liberty to be governed by her decisions, but outside of it she should not interfere.

¹ Earl Russell, *Divorce*, chap. xiii., p. 175.

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As a matter of fact, her attitude towards the all-important questions of morality, marriage, and parenthood is not good enough for the present day. A far more lofty conception of marriage than that of 'a remedy against sin' is now beginning to awake in the hearts of men. 'A mere ascetic protest against everything agreeable is not good enough or wise enough for the age in which we live. The new problem for such a new world is the reconciliation of the tremendous empire of the senses, the solitary supremacy of the soul. Neither Protestantism nor Romanism has been able to blend or harmonise these two inextinguishable tendencies.'¹

Nevertheless, such a solution will be found, and an ardent and sincere endeavour is being made to find it now. So long as the Church maintains her ancient attitude, there is no hope of such a solution being found by her. Nevertheless, a rejection of Christianity does not imply a rejection of religion. 'Religion

¹ The Rev. H. R. Haweis, 'The New Clergy,' *Contemporary Review*, vol. lxviii., p. 606.

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is not to us imposed, as a rule, however venerable, from without, but developed by movement of the conscience from within. Authority, history, tradition, catholic consent—all may be involved as of old; but the tribunal is changed, and unless a favourable response is obtained from the individual judgment and will, there is no adhesion and no real religion.’¹

The individual ‘judgment and will’ are beginning to recognise an immense sense of responsibility in regard to all matters relating to parenthood, to see that the mystery of Birth is entitled to at least as great a reverence as that attached to the mystery of Death, and to perceive that the passions and instincts of men may be turned to a power for good as great as they have been for evil. And where ‘history, authority, tradition, and catholic consent’ run counter to these convictions, the modern mind will reject them and go elsewhere in search of a higher ideal of life.

¹ The Editor, ‘Church Reform,’ *Contemporary Review*, vol. lxxviii., p. 653.

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CHAPTER VI.

IF there is one argument more often put forward than another when any proposal of reform in the existing marriage laws of this country is suggested, it is that 'it would destroy the purity and the safeguards of family life.'¹

¹ For example: the Rev. H. W. Webb-Peploe in an interview with the representative of the *Morning Post*, says: 'Beyond these two changes [*i.e.*, enabling the poor to obtain divorce as readily as the rich; to give women equal rights to divorce with men], I believe it would be fatal to the social, moral, and religious life of our country to create fresh facilities for divorce.'—*Morning Post*, November 18th, 1912.

The *Church Times* (quoted in the *Morning Post* of November 16th): 'All divorce is an evil, but it attains its worst when it means that man or woman can easily cast off one consort for the purpose of taking another. That is what endangers the family and shakes the foundations of family life. . . .' Referring to the suggestions of the Majority Report of the recent Divorce Commission, the same journal gives it as its opinion that, 'taken as grounds for permission to contract a new marriage, they are dangerous to society.'—*Morning Post*, November 16th, 1912.

Again, Lord Halifax addressing a meeting on September 30th said: 'A strict marriage law was at once the safe-

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Upon this point Churchmen in general High and Low, Roman Catholic and Anglican, and members of the Non-conforming bodies seem to unite, whatever their differing interpretations of the texts from which their principles are derived. There are happily a few noteworthy exceptions, but the bulk of religious bodies seem to be agreed that to relax the severity of the Marriage Laws and to reform their injustice would sap the whole foundations of the morality of this country. One would imagine, to hear them upon this point, that they regard the 'integrity of family life' in this country as unshaken, its 'purity' as untainted, and the 'sacredness of the marriage bond' as unquestioned.

Nevertheless, on other occasions their guard of the family and the safeguard of the individuals who composed it.—*Morning Post*, October 1st, 1912.

In 1857 Mr. Beresford Hope in the House of Commons said his opposition to the Divorce Bill, then under consideration, 'was the consequence of a strong desire to preserve intact the morality of this country, which happily in many respects stood very high.' He felt that such reforms as were then proposed would 'sap the foundations of public morality.'—Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Bill, August 4th. *Hansard*, vol. 147, 1857.

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utterances prove that they are perfectly aware that the very reverse is the case; they are always deploring the present prevalence of immorality. The fact is 'our age possesses no morality at all, corresponding to the present spiritual state of the world's historical development: it is without a characteristic morality capable of satisfying the most inward necessities. Regarded from the point of view of its innermost nature, morality is to-day at least as insecure as religion.'¹

This argument, that any relaxation of the principle that marriage is indissoluble would be fatal to national morality, was also widely used to oppose the passing of the Divorce Act of 1857. It would destroy the integrity of family life, it would sap the foundations of the country, its results would be disastrous. Yet was the morality of the country at that time so pure that it was undesirable to make any alterations in the marriage laws?

What do we read in the Majority Report

¹Rudolf Eucken, *Main Currents of Modern Thought*, p. 387.

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of the recent Divorce Commission? 'The state of social morality before the Act of 1857 was the subject of strong comments from time to time by eminent preachers and writers.' It then goes on to quote from *Marriage, Divorce, and Separation* (a standard work on the subject by Mr. Bishop). 'Indeed it is well known that in England . . . second marriages without divorce, and adulteries and the birth of illegitimate children, are of everyday occurrence; while polygamy is in these circumstances winked at, though a felony on the statute-book. . . .'¹

Ellen Key, writing of this period, says: 'Did prostitution not exist in the North? Were all children legitimate? Were all unions happy? Were there no forsaken wives, no unfaithful husbands? We know the answer to these questions. The social conscience was still so unawakened that sexual immorality was looked upon as necessary and intangible, so long as due homage was rendered to

¹ *Report of the Royal Commission on Divorce and Matrimonial Causes, 1912, p. 38.*

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moral monogamy by the external proprieties. Every one is aware that the sons and husbands of well-born families used to seduce the daughters of their dependents, and also the domestic servants in their own employ. The wives and mothers of these gentlemen were often aware of these facts, but their wisdom in feigning to be ignorant of them was applauded.* Everybody knows that husbands kept mistresses and that wives had lovers in their own social circle. Every one is aware also that men had illegitimate families before, and even after they married. That husbands, sons, fiancés left the family circle to go to houses of ill-fame. Every one knows that the case is the same to-day.¹

‘I am afraid,’ said Mr. Gladstone in 1857,

* A character in Mr. Shaw’s novel, *The Irrational Knot*, says, in speaking of a liaison of her daughter’s fiancé which has been brought to her knowledge, ‘Such things are recognised, though of course they are not spoken of. No lady could, with common decency, pretend to know that such connections are possible, much less assign one of them as a reason for breaking off an engagement.’ See *The Irrational Knot*, by G. B. Shaw (chap. iv. p. 91), written in 1880. (Constable & Co., 1905.)

¹ Ellen Key, *De l’Amour et du Mariage*, pp. 213, 214.

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‘as respects the gross evils of prostitution, that there is hardly any country in the world where they prevail to a greater extent than in our own. With regard to another most dangerous evil—namely, what is called ante-nuptial incontinence, its prevalence is so general in country as well as in town, that we must all feel humbled to the dust when we consider with how little strictness Christian obligations are in that respect observed.’ . . . ‘In the higher classes . . . adultery paraded under the roof and in the view of the suffering wife—adultery with moral cruelty . . . cases of that kind were common in the upper ranks of Society.’¹

When we honestly admit this to be the case to-day, when we confess that the standard of real morality in this country is for the most part very low and not very high, that the ‘purity and integrity of our family life,’ of which we so often boast, is unfortunately to a large extent but an empty phrase ; when we

¹ See Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Bill. *Hansard*, vol. 147. (1857.)

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realise that amongst the very poorest class the respect for the marriage tie could not well be lessened by any relaxation of existing laws, because that respect is practically non-existent,¹ then we shall acknowledge that something is wrong in our entire attitude towards love and marriage, and we shall seek for a remedy.

‘If, therefore, it were proved that the restriction of the existing law of divorce was responsible for widespread immorality, which the introduction of additional grounds of divorce would remedy, the State would have strong reasons for making the change.’² No longer confounding results with causes, we must ask ourselves if peradventure there be not some connection between the fact that, on the one hand, while the divorce laws in this country are more severe than those in any other European country, on the other the proportion of prostitution to the population is

¹ See evidence of some members of the Mothers’ Union referred to in *Divorce Commission Minority Report*, 1912, p. 176.

Ibid., pp. 175, 176.

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in excess over that of any other European country.¹ We shall admit that the public attitude towards morality has hitherto been almost entirely directed and influenced by the teaching of Christianity, that even the inadequate and limited relief given by the Divorce Law of 1857 was strenuously resisted by the adherents of that teaching and was in direct opposition to its principles, and that its limitations are due to the influence of the leaders of Christian thought. And we shall then openly and honestly question whether the results of this teaching have led to satisfactory results, and whether it be true, as it is claimed, that 'nothing has contributed so much to the purity of family life, and therefore to the greatness of our country, as the deep and stern sense of the *absolute* indissolubility of the marriage bond.'² Also, we shall then

¹ For confirmation of these facts see (a) *Divorce*, by Earl Russell, page 70. And (b) Report of Evidence given before Select Committee of the House of Lords, relating to the protection of young girls, in 1881.

² Canon Knox Little, 'Marriage and Divorce: the Doctrine of the Church of England.' *Contemporary Review*, vol. lxxviii., p. 269, 1895.

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openly question whether this teaching has led to satisfactory results, whether the general morality of this country is such as to justify our general acceptation of the principles laid down by Christianity? Whether the awakening spirit of responsibility, with higher ideals of morality, both for men and women, evidence of whose existence is becoming daily more frequent in the field of literature, has been called into being by those who are in agreement with the Church's teaching, or by those who are in frank opposition to it? Furthermore, we shall not confuse the dogmatic teaching of official Christendom with that of Christ himself, and we shall ask whether the Christian Church is justified in maintaining that it is on his authority that she upholds those principles of, and that attitude towards, sexual morality of which the practice of modern Christian countries is the outcome?

If we conclude that the orthodox teaching of Christianity in these matters has proved harmful rather than beneficial to humanity in its results—that it has served rather to degrade

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than to uplift the general conception of all that appertains to the great mystery of birth, the responsibilities of parenthood, and the relationship of the sexes—such conclusion will not of itself be sufficient. ‘If a morality cannot by its own proper virtue hold its opposing immorality in check, then there is something wrong with that morality. It runs the risk of encountering a fresh and more vigorous morality.’¹ Bearing this in mind, we shall seek for a new conception, for new ideals, new principles, all tending to a higher standard of social morality. And we shall do so with a sense of that deep responsibility which must ever rest on the shoulders of those who are living in eras of change and renewal—when old ideas must be weighed in the balance, old beliefs be challenged, old habits altered to meet new conditions.

What, we may ask ourselves, are our standards of morality to-day as between

¹ Havelock Ellis, *The Task of Social Hygiene*, chap. ix., p. 308.

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men and women and towards the responsibilities of parenthood? How is that morality to be tested? Of all tests of morality in this country perhaps that of a low percentage of appeals for divorce is the most misleading,* the reason being that divorce is made so difficult, and not only so difficult but so expensive, that it is entirely beyond the reach of any but the moderately affluent. Such a stigma is still attached to the idea of divorce, so repellent to sensitive minds is the publicity entailed by it, so limited the grounds on which it is obtainable, that most people will endure untold hardships and indignities, and acute suffering, both physical and mental, rather than have recourse to it, even where it is within their means to do so.

If the owner of a fruit-farm surrounds his property with a high wall surmounted with cut glass, his doing so is evidence of the mistrust he feels of his neighbour's honesty, and

* 'How fallacious it is to consider that a small number of divorces in England is indicative of a high state of morality in the country.'—*Report of the Divorce Commission, 1912*, page 46.

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it is no testimony to their moral integrity that his fruit is not stolen. But if he surrounds his fruit-trees only with a low and easily-surmountable fence, and finds that he is not robbed, although perhaps his fruit may be the most desirable in the neighbourhood, then he is justified and his neighbours will be justified in congratulating themselves on their honesty. But those who are placed beyond the possibility of breaking a law are unable to give a proof of integrity in abiding by it; the chances are that the severity of the law will defeat its own ends by driving people to break its spirit in other directions. This is exactly what has been the result of the very severe marriage laws in this country. 'The soundest ethical writers and the soundest jurists have always held that the absolute indissolubility of the marriage tie will only lead, as it has done in other countries, to a connivance at conjugal infidelity, and to a general laxity of morals. Nor is this unnatural.'¹

¹ Mr. Walpole in the House of Commons, July 31st, 1857. See *Hansard*, vol. 147.

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The difficulties in the way of obtaining divorce on reasonable grounds have led directly to the formation of any number of illegal unions and to a vast amount of prostitution. Lord Russell affirms that 'he cannot too often repeat that the restrictions of the present law make directly for immorality; that, as a consequence of the present law, immorality is rampant and flourishes unchecked by a healthy public opinion.'¹ Again, 'the experience of every state and country withholding this redress (*i.e.* divorce) is practically, however men theorise, that no form of matrimonial delinquency is less prevalent there than elsewhere. And to the extent to which separations actually occur, the community is remitted back to the condition it would be in if marriage itself was abolished.'²

To what extent does immorality flourish in this country? Exact figures are impossible to obtain. Immorality naturally is concealed as far as possible, and therefore only a general

¹ Earl Russell, *Divorce*, p. 183.

² *Report of the Divorce Commission*, 1912, pp. 38, 39.

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deduction can be made by taking the evidence of those most competent to judge.

‘Almost everywhere’ we are told, ‘prostitution is increasing in a higher ratio than the population,’¹ and in England, as we have seen, its proportion to the population is considerably in excess of that of other European countries. Exact figures are impossible to obtain, but an estimate was given for the beginning of 1906, that in London the prostitutes then numbered 70,000 to 80,000. In 1905, 4929 cases were charged. Whereas in France and other European countries prostitution is under State regulation, here there exists no such regulation, prostitutes are subject to no medical examination, and the result is that they spread disease and death unchecked. ‘The freedom of the prostitute in England is further guaranteed by the very fervour of English religious feeling; for active interference with prostitutes involves regulation of prostitution which to a very large section of

¹ Westermarck, *History of Human Marriage*, chap. iv., p. 70.

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the English people would be altogether repellant.'¹ The mortality amongst the prostitutes themselves will give some idea of the highly dangerous character of the diseases from which they suffer—according to the Female Guardian Society's Report for 1906—not less than one-tenth of those practising this terrible profession died within the limits of a year. We hear a great deal of the heavy mortality due to the ravages of consumption, but most of us are unaware that consumption claims 'but one-seventh of the victims that the diseases incident to the White Slave Traffic do.'²

Immorality is apparently most prevalent amongst the very rich and the very poor. 'In smart society,' writes Lord Russell, 'it is notorious that adultery both of husbands and wives is exceedingly prevalent.'³ Among artisans we read in the Majority Report of the recent Divorce Commission that a gener-

¹ Havelock Ellis, *The Task of Social Hygiene*, chap. ix., p. 271.

² Mrs. Mackirdy and W. N. Willis, *The White Slave Market*, p. 18.

³ Earl Russell, *Divorce*, chap. vi., p. 74.

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ally high standard of morality exists, but the authors add that, owing to the great cost of divorce and to its inconvenience, they are exposed to special temptations.¹

Of the ravages wrought by immoral habits among our population we shall never know the full extent : it is a subject on which, owing to its nature, it is difficult to write. Nevertheless it is ‘undoubtedly those subjects which we are accustomed to regard as “delicate” which demand inquiry ; the very fact that we fear them demonstrates how vitally they are related to the well - being or unhappiness of Society.’ We should do well to remember that ‘what we do not think too bad to allow to exist, we ought not to think too bad to have brought home to our consciousness.’² And the more thoughtfully one observes human affairs, the more cogent becomes the conviction that the silence upon topics which secretly engage the mind of every adult is

¹ See p. 40 of the Report.

² Beatrice and Sidney Webb, *The Prevention of Destitution*, chap. x., p. 307. (1911.)

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not a symptom of a healthy state of intelligence, but is indeed a sign of morbidity.’¹ The question of prostitution has hitherto been the national skeleton-in-the-cupboard of this country ; it is high time that we faced the problem which it offers, courageously, wholesomely, and sensibly—never losing sight of the fact that every evil has its remedy, and that no effectual remedy can be discovered without a sincere and complete investigation of causes.

To say that the severe marriage laws of this country enforced by the principle of Christianity are the sole cause of prostitution would be as unfair as it would be false. Prostitution is rare amongst people of primitive culture, living in a state of nature, and ‘unaffected by foreign influence.’ Why? Because prostitution is the result of a law of repression. Savages do not recognise such a law, although they have their own code of morals. As we have already seen, restrictions

¹ Geoffrey Mortimer, ‘The Work of Havelock Ellis,’ *Westminster Review*, vol. 158, p. 542. (1902.)

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(resulting from their own inward convictions) are primarily laid down by the more advanced and influential minds, who then try to enforce their own standards on the public. But as men are not all alike, as the evolution, physical, mental, and spiritual, of some members of society is far in arrears of that of others, although the less advanced may be influenced by the fear of penalties involved by transgressing a repressive law, they will not experience the inward conviction of which such a law is the outcome and of which it is the motive. They may outwardly accede to the propositions laid down, they may appear not to infringe its regulations, but too often their conduct will be at complete variance with those principles of which the law is the recognised expression. Even where they do not actually transgress the law, it is well to remember that 'moral conduct is not identical with social correctness.'¹

This is exactly what has happened in

¹ Rudolf Eucken, *Main Currents of Modern Thought*, p. 401.

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regard to Christianity and the principles laid down by it in regard to sexual morality. Morality *cannot* be enforced on individuals from without. 'All the repression in the world can only touch the surface of life.' 'Moreover, as soon as the law enters the sphere of morals, it loses all its certainty and all the reverence that rightly belongs to it. . . . the feelings and the habits of the mass of the population are altogether ignored.' 'Immorality can be increased by unwise legislation, but, however desirable it is to prevent immorality, that end can never be attained by law.'¹

It is well that morality cannot be enforced by external measures and by coercion, for it is a plant of deep growth, and can only spring from inward motives and inward convictions, of which it is the outward evidence. Motives are a matter so private, so personal that we can seldom estimate them. They are so subtle that we often

¹ Havelock Ellis, *The Task of Social Hygiene*, chap. ix., pp. 271, 262, and 287.

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miscalculate even the motives that animate our own conduct. How are we, then, to judge the motives of others? Nothing is harder, or requires more spiritual insight and sympathy, than to judge, 'not after the appearance, but after the heart.'

It is in the matter of supplying an often *unworthy motive* that Christianity has failed in her task of directing moral behaviour in the domain of sex. 'As a matter of fact, we have to deal with a Manichean element which has forced its way into Christianity, and, in spite of all outward strictness, tends to produce inward shallowness; for shallowness it is when the chief care of life is to carry on a struggle against the sensuous, to weaken and degrade it as far as possible, and when those who have been peculiarly successful in this stamping out the sense element are honoured as heroes and selected as patterns, no matter how hard or shallow they may be. For, after all, what inner purification of the soul or development of spiritual life is gained by such a misuse of the senses? Moreover,

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this repression of the senses, like everything unnatural, must produce greater evils than those which it undertakes to remove. Nature is in the habit of taking a severe revenge for misuse.’¹

Having offered an unworthy motive and found it insufficient to accomplish her aim of moral regeneration, the Church, with a singular want of psychological insight, made the further error of trying external measures of repression. The present state of morality in Christian countries is the measure of the Church’s failure.

In addition to the severity of the marriage laws and their injustice, which the best authorities recognise as having directly driven large numbers of people into prostitution and into illegal unions,² the principal causes of immorality and prostitution are perhaps as follows :

Low wages for women’s work.

¹ Rudolf Eucken, *Main Currents of Modern Thought*, pp. 403, 404.

² See *Divorce*, by Earl Russell and the recent Report of the Divorce Commission (Majority Section).

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Late marriages.

Disgraceful housing accommodation.

Mental deficiency.

The dullness of the lives of the poor.

The luxury of the rich.

The false ideas of enjoyment.

Drink.

False prudery.

‘Any reforms in prostitution can only follow a reform in our marriage system.’¹ Why and how severe marriage laws drive people into immorality and prostitution will be dealt with in a separate chapter, as also the mistake made by parents in keeping their children in ignorance of physical facts, of the duties and responsibilities entailed by parenthood, and of the terrible dangers involved by immorality.

The low wages offered for women’s work is a fruitful cause of prostitution. Women are driven by sheer necessity to become prostitutes in order to support their families. For in-

¹ Havelock Ellis, *The Task of Social Hygiene*, chap. ix. p. 303.

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stance, 'in 1887 it was proved that in the city of Edinburgh there were upwards of sixty miserable families whose only source of maintenance was the mother's dishonour.'¹

It is often a sore temptation to hard-working girls to see others very much better kept and dressed than themselves living in what is to them comparative luxury without having to work long hours for a miserable pittance at uncongenial occupations. The consequence is that they join them in the profession of prostitution. Some shop-owners and officials openly encourage their hands to resort to these means as a method of supplementing the disgracefully insufficient salaries which they offer. The large numerical excess of women over men also serves to keep down the low rate of wages. If one woman refuses an ill-paid job, another will be driven by sheer starvation to accept it.²

¹ Annette B. Meakin, *Woman in Transition*, chap. iv., p. 70. (Methuen & Co.)

² For figures regarding the rate of women's wages, see Reports of the Anti-Sweating League and Handbook of the Sweated Industries Exhibition, 1906.

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The question of wages is a highly complex one, which it is impossible fully to discuss here. 'A great deal has been done towards improving the condition of women workers in this country, but very much still remains to be done, and until some sort of minimum wage is established and until living-in houses are all under *constant* inspection of *qualified women*, we cannot possibly hope that prostitution in its entirety will cease. As long as women are cheap, so long will prostitution flourish.'¹

Not only are low wages a potent cause of destitution, by causing a vast amount of sickness, 'due simply to the lack of food, to the overcrowding of the dwelling, to the inability to take either adequate rest or precautions against exposure, all this arising directly from want of money'²; but they are, indirectly, a cause of incalculable disease and racial poison—for wherever the prostitute class is increased there disease and decay are spread abroad

¹ Mrs. Mackirdy and W. N. Willis, *The White Slave Market*, pp. 208, 209.

² Beatrice and Sidney Webb, *The Prevention of Destitution*, chap. v., p. 86.

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unchecked, and are transmitted to innocent wives and inherited by their offspring. Disease itself is one of the most fruitful sources of destitution. From a commercial point of view, if from no other, 'some day we may decide that the community cannot afford to have in its midst women selling themselves for men's indulgences.'¹

'The chief factor in the increase of prostitution,' says Professor Westermarck, 'is the growing number of unmarried people.'²

Late marriages are largely caused by the low salaries of many professional men. The standard of living having enormously increased, the price of living having also risen largely in excess of the rate of wages,³ many clerks and other business men and artisans are unable to marry on their small salaries, because they cannot support the women of their own class

¹ *Prostitution, its Nature and Cure*, pamphlet published by Penal Reform League, No. 9, p. 6 (1912).

² Westermarck, *History of Human Marriage*, chap. iv., p. 70.

³ See *The Living Wage*, by Philip Snowden, M.P. (Hodder & Stoughton, 1912.)

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as they expect to be supported. Hence they are driven into immoral relations and habits. There are other causes for the decline in marriage, which will be dealt with later ; but it is a feature of modern life which is not confined to England alone.

‘Nowadays, a woman without a marriage portion, unless she has some great natural attractions, runs the risk of being a spinster for ever. This state of things naturally grows up in a society where monogamy is prescribed by law, and where the adult women outnumber the adult men, where many men never marry, and where married women too often lead an indolent life. The chief cause of increasing celibacy is the difficulty of supporting a family in modern society.’ In non-European countries, the wives help their husbands to procure a living, and ‘instead of being expensive, are rather a profit to them.’ The same is true of the working classes in Europe, and therefore it is that celibacy is more prevalent in the higher classes. ‘It is obvious that women have to

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suffer from this trouble more than men, the life of so many of them being comparatively so useless and their pretensions nevertheless so high.'¹

In France, marriage is more and more on the decline. 'In Sweden, young men of the upper classes marry much later than they did of old.' The marriage rate is lower there even than in Belgium. That this delay in marrying does not imply that men are leading moral and ascetic lives is obvious. A Swedish girl writes in the present century that eighty per cent. of the men are suffering from contagious diseases. The women know it, and fear to risk marriage.'²

The disgraceful housing accommodation of a large proportion of our poor populations is one of the most fruitful causes of immorality. It is inevitable that when large numbers of human beings of both sexes are living together

¹ Westermarck, *History of Human Marriage*, chap. xviii., p. 416, and chap. vii., p. 147 and 148.

² Annette B. Meakin, *Women in Transition*, chap. iii., pp. 45 and 48.

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in one room, and even in one bed, that their morality should be conspicuous by its absence. 'The herding together, by day and by night, of men and women, of young and old, of boys and girls, of all degrees of relationship or of no relationship, not only destroys health, but makes, to the ordinary human being, the particular virtue upon which the integrity of the family depends wholly impracticable. . . . We should like every legislator, every member of a Local Authority, and every national and municipal officer from one end of the kingdom to another, to be forced to gaze every day on a series of photographs of the 'Going to bed' of literally hundreds of thousands of families . . . with fathers, mothers, sons and daughters, children and infants lying in the same bed, often with male and female lodgers occupying corners of the same room.'¹ Children, from the earliest ages, become familiar with immorality, and the melancholy result is that prostitution—which

¹ Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *The Prevention of Destitution*, chap. x., pp. 306 and 307.

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is unknown amongst children of tender years in other European countries—is rife amongst them in this ‘moral’ population of ours.¹

The presence of a large mentally-deficient class supplies numerous recruits to the prostitute class. The morals of people whose intelligence is deficient are notoriously low—this fact is another proof of the folly of trying to ignore the influence of man’s physical nature on his mental and spiritual nature. It is not wilful wickedness on the part of the mentally deficient that leads them into immorality, but their very absence of intelligence and of control. Moreover, it is very difficult for girls of this unhappy class to get any occupation, consequently feeble-minded girls ‘drop’ into prostitution—a profession where intelligence is not a necessary asset. Here, as elsewhere, it is too often the so-called ‘right-minded’ who stand in the way of a crying reform. When it is proposed to lay any

¹ See evidence given before the Select Committee relating to the Protection of Young Girls. (Parliamentary Blue Book, 1881.)

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restriction on the rights to parenthood and reproduction of this afflicted class, a tremendous outcry is made by the 'right-minded.' They—who are so ready to interfere with the liberty of the subject when his views happen to differ from their own (when that subject wishes, for instance, to break the bonds of a disastrous marriage tie)—are loud in their protests when it is suggested that it were a wise and humane policy to restrict the liberty of the unfit to replenish the earth—a class whose existence even they cannot deny is a hindrance to progress and a most dangerous menace to society.

Legislation is now prominently before the public in regard to the matter both of Housing Reform and of the Mentally Deficient Class. If our aim be to improve the morality of the race, then it is of urgent importance that drastic measures be enforced, both for the better housing of the poor and for safeguarding society against any increase in the ranks of the mentally 'unfit.' As two further causes productive of immorality, we have the two

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extremes of the dullness of the lives of the poor and the luxury of the rich.

The luxury of the rich is a self-evident cause of immorality. Many of the very rich have ideas of enjoyment as false as those of the very poor: they will deny themselves nothing that money can buy in the hope of satisfying their jaded pleasure-thirst, nor do they deny anything to the objects of their illicit passions.

‘It would be well,’ said Mr. Holmes in his recent book on Education, ‘if our moralists could realise that the chief causes of weakness in the presence of sensual temptation are, on the one hand, boredom and *ennui*, and, on the other hand, flabbiness and degeneracy of spiritual fibre, and that the remedy for both these defects is to give the young the type of education which will foster rather than hinder growth.’¹

The dullness of the lives of young people of the poorer classes often drives them into

¹ Edmond Holmes, *What Is and What Might Be*, chap. vi., pp. 282, 283.

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immorality. They have no intelligent and wholesome recreations to which to resort in their leisure hours. They have been at work all day and have only the streets in which to wander, or 'places of amusement' of a very vulgar type to which they can resort, and they are thus subjected to special temptations.

Both these classes have a very false standard of enjoyment, which is not, however, confined to the very poor or the very rich, but which permeates all grades of society at the present time. This is an evil which no legislation can alter. 'We must change our standard of reality before we can hope to reform Society Three-fourths of the moral evil in the world are due to malignant egoism.'¹

One of the most potent causes of the false ideas of what constitutes happiness is our present system of education. 'The victim of a repressive, growth-arresting education, having few if any interests in life,

¹ Edmond Holmes, *What Is and What Might Be*, chap. vi., p. 288.

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not infrequently takes to the meretricious excitements of sensuality in order to relieve the intolerable monotony of his days. But the training which makes for many-sided growth, by filling the life of the 'adolescent' with many and various interests, removes temptations of this particular type from his path. And it does more for him than this. It generates in him a state of health and well-being in which the very vigour and elasticity of his spiritual fibre automatically shields him from temptation by refusing to allow the germs of moral disease to effect a lodgment in his soul.'¹

It will not be sufficient, however, for members of the poorer classes if we give them such an education as the writer suggests. We must provide legitimate enjoyment and occupation for their leisure hours. The activity and imagination of youth must find an outlet, and we should do well to follow the example set in Chicago which is so well

¹ Edmond Holmes, *What Is and What Might Be*, chap. vi., p. 282.

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described by its organizer and promoter, Miss Jane Addams, in *The Spirit of Growth and the City Streets*. If we discard the theory that the tendencies of human nature are towards evil rather than towards good, and substitute an opposite theory that its instincts are rather towards the beautiful and good, then we shall make every effort to appeal to those instincts, to draw them out, to give them free play, and instead of trying to repress the evil, we shall try to develop the good. Very often a bad quality is only an energy that has flown in the wrong direction. Rowdyism, under other circumstances and with different environment, might have developed into courage ; and one who has lapsed into immorality, and thence into prostitution, might have been a loving and devoted wife. How often, on the other hand, is a so-called ' blameless life ' merely the outcome of an absence of strong temptations to error !

Once more, in regard to Drink—prostitution and immorality have always been closely allied to drink. ' Be it noted that the influence

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of alcohol upon youth of both sexes greatly favours not only immorality but venereal disease.'¹ Dr. Saleeby also affirms that 'in Great Britain, at any rate, there is an increase of drinking amongst women and girls.' On the other hand, Mr. Thomas Holmes, the well-known Police-court Missionary says: 'It has become quite the fashion in certain quarters to describe the women of England as increasingly drunken; a statement that cannot possibly be substantiated.'²

But whether drink be on the increase among women or no, all authorities are agreed that in both men and women drink is closely allied to, and largely responsible for, a vast amount of immorality.

Having now considered the main causes of the prevalence of immorality and prostitution in this country, we can see that some of them are deeply involved with such complicated questions as housing accommodation

¹ C. W. Saleeby, *Woman and Womanhood*, chap. xv., pp. 228, 229.

Thomas Holmes, *Psychology and Crime*, chap. v., p. 68. (J. M. Dent & Sons, 1912.)

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and the rate of wages. Very happily, both these subjects are now being constantly discussed, and while housing reform is being actually legislated for, we may be certain that the turn of Wages will soon come. We may also see that immorality is not *entirely* caused by a decided tendency towards sensuality and excess in human nature, although directly or indirectly it is brought about by selfishness.

But it is useless to deny that morality is at a very low ebb in this country as a whole, and we should wish to remind those who are always quoting Christ as their authority for repressive legislation in regard to marriage, that the sin which he denounced far more often and more strongly than he did adultery was that of *hypocrisy*. Let them remember, too that it was exactly those individuals who were highly versed in the law, who were always referring to it, whom he denounced perpetually as 'hypocrites,' and for whom he foretold the most terrible retribution. We protest that any one who insists that England,

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as a whole, is a moral country in regard to marriage and sex relations, and who opposes any amendment in the marriage law on the theory that it would destroy a reverential regard for marriage (which is conspicuous largely by its absence), that any one who suggests that added facilities for divorce would break up family life, which industrial conditions have long since shattered, is either wilfully blind or a hypocrite. Let them remember the words of Christ, 'Cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.'

In the following chapter we shall see how the tendency of the repressive marriage laws and the absence of facilities for divorce make for the maintenance and appearance of outward virtue and the actual encouragement of immorality.

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CHAPTER VII.

ONE of the characters in the *Dream Play* of August Strindberg exclaims: 'It is very difficult to be married. It is more difficult than anything else. One has to be an angel, I think.'¹ 'Marriage,' wrote Bentham, 'is a desperate thing. The frogs in Æsop were extreme wise; they had a great mind to some water, but they would not leap into the well, because they could not get out again.'

Marriage has always provided a fruitful topic for discussion. Its intricacies, problems, disappointments, failures, tragedies, have furnished the dramatist and author with endless themes. No one cares to write stories of happy marriages; they are dull and devoid of incident save to the participants. To such a point has this prominence of the sex question attained that one frequently hears people say: 'I am sick to death of it! Why cannot

¹ August Strindberg, *The Dream Play*, p. 55.

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they write about something else?' They are quite right to be sick of it, from one point of view. The sex problem is to a great extent an artificial one, and need not exist. From another point of view they are mistaken. 'The problem of sex . . . is the problem of life; it is the problem of society's happiness, in comparison with which all other problems sink into insignificance.'¹ No problem is more important: it has reached to-day a crisis in its history, and *must* be dealt with. It will never be settled by ignoring it.

Plays are not written about the hunger problem, though, God knows, that might provide some dramatic tragedies . . . even comedies perhaps. But about the other great human instinct, love-hunger—they are innumerable. The desire for food, the desire to mate—these are the two great physical instincts implanted in man: they have their counterparts in his spiritual nature also.

Ascetics are right when they say these two instincts should be under control; the glutton,

¹ Ellen Key, *Love and Ethics*, p. 18.

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the drunkard, and the voluptuary—these are all enemies of themselves and of humanity. They are wrong when they say that they should be repressed, and that a man must live a life of celibacy and starvation in order to develop his higher nature.

A man may sacrifice many things dear to himself in the pursuit of a great ideal, but so long as he does not sacrifice others he will be doing a better service to humanity by fully developing his powers than were he to sacrifice himself. There are cases, however, where 'sometimes it is a greater sin to allow oneself to be sacrificed than to sacrifice others; at other times the reverse is true. And if we are asked who is to decide which is the lesser sin, the answer is, the individual's conscience which has to decide in the case of other equally conflicting duties.'¹

To return to the ever-recurrent problem of marriage. Possibly, and very likely, in primitive countries it is a very natural affair, but the more civilised, cultured, enlightened,

¹ Ellen Key, *Love and Ethics*, p. 58.

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and the more highly developed do people become the more difficult does marriage become. Why? Because the more is demanded of it, the more do individuals suffer if these demands are not satisfied.

However, even among primitive peoples, there are rocks to be encountered in married life. The Old Testament is full of naïf recitals of tragedies connected with love and marriage and sexual passion. Abraham, whose married life with Sarah is to this day held up in the English marriage service as an example that modern couples should strive to follow, was an instance. His morals were certainly not such as the Church could approve, for he kept other mistresses than the one his wife provided him with, and then compelled him, against his wishes, to turn out-of-doors.¹

We may take it, however, on the whole, that the difficulties of married life have increased with the increase of culture.

Why, let us ask ourselves, should marriage be so difficult in the present day? Why

¹ Genesis, xxv. 6.

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is it so unpopular? Why should the percentage of happy marriages be so low as compared with the failures? Let us remember, also, that there must be many more failures than are apparent to the ordinary, undiscerning eye. 'The sufferers do not air their grievances on the housetops. The nature of these grievances is such that every effort is made, in most cases, to keep them from the eyes and ears of relatives, friends, or neighbours, until they become too hard to bear.'¹

The growing unpopularity of marriage will not be denied, for it is only too obvious. More than twenty years ago an article in the *Westminster Review* dealt with this subject. The author assigned the increase of culture as its principal cause, and called attention to three periods in history when a decline in marriage was accompanied by unexampled intellectual and æsthetic culture — namely, Athens in the time of Pericles; Rome in the Augustan Age; and Italy during the Renaissance. 'Marriage,' he wrote, 'is losing

¹ *Divorce Commission Report*, 1912, p. 47.

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its popularity; it is beginning to die out. . . . at present it must be accepted as a positive fact that marriage is on the wane. It is a decaying institution. . . . If the number of those who would, if they conveniently could, sever their inauspicious marriage-knots, were to be added to those who, chiefly for cultural purposes, are content to remain in single blessedness, the small residuum of really happy marriages would strike the enthusiastic advocates of the institution with dismay.¹ It grows continually more evident that many people prefer either not to marry, or to marry later in life than was formerly the case. Strange to relate, it is not amongst men alone that this aversion to and dread of marriage is now so evident. Women, too, for whom, until recent years, marriage was regarded as the only 'profession' worth consideration, have begun to look askance at it, and to ask themselves whether the advantages offered by matrimony are not

¹ See 'The Decline of Marriage.' Article by 'Eugenius' in the *Westminster Review*, vol. cxxxv., 1891.

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outweighed by the alternative occupations and conditions now open to them?

The modern reluctance to marriage, and the very marked decline in the birth-rate, are loudly denounced—and with singular inconsistency—by the Church. Surely, as the Church still attaches a stigma to all that relates to the reproduction of the species, it is an inconsistency, when a decline in reproduction manifests itself, to condemn those responsible for it? In reality, the decline in the birth-rate is not altogether a matter to be deplored. As an economist remarks, 'It is to the decline of the birth-rate that we probably owe it that the modern civilised world has been saved from economic disaster. . . . Wherever are gathered together an exceedingly fine race of people, the flower of the race, individuals of the highest mental and moral distinction, there the birth-rate falls steadily.'¹

¹ Havelock Ellis, *The Task of Social Hygiene*, chap. vi., p. 194. The economist quoted is Dr. Scott Nearing, in 'Race Suicide versus Over-population.' *Popular Science Monthly*, January, 1911.

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In the past, people were reckless and had far too many children. Perhaps, when they have less, they will take more care of them, and we shall have less infant mortality.¹ Every one has too many children who brings into the world more than he can bring up in health and educate to be desirable citizens. If the State demands a high birth-rate, it must render it possible for parents so to bring them up. What we may reasonably deplore is that, for the most part, it is the fit, and not the unfit, who decline to have children, though it is questionable whether any one is fit to be a parent who does not desire to have children. Under present industrial conditions, to demand an all-round increase of the birth-rate is to court destruction. Those who are most insistent in this demand would do

¹ 'My own opinion regarding the birth-rate is that so long as we continue to slay, during the first year of life alone, one in six or seven of all children born . . . the fall in the birth-rate should be a matter of humanitarian satisfaction.'—C. W. Saleeby, *Woman and Womanhood*, chap. xvii., p. 288.

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well to study M. Brieux's powerful play, *Maternity*.¹

If the rate of infant mortality be largely reduced, as we hope it may be in the near future, the balance as to males and females in the population will, by degrees, be naturally readjusted, for 'Nature gives us more than a fair start, almost as if she knew that the wastage of male life is apt to be higher at all ages even under the best conditions—she sends more male children into the world.'² The anti-militarist spirit also, which is increasingly manifesting itself in Europe at the present time—the revolt of mankind at the policy of entering into needless warfare, if carried to a successful issue will prove highly beneficial to marriage. For although

¹ 'I look for that glorious hour of liberation when some master-mind shall discover for us the means of having only the children we need and desire, release us for ever from the prison of hypocrisy, and absolve us from the profanation of love. That would, indeed, be a conquest of nature—savage nature—which pours out life with culpable profusion, and sees it disappear with indifference.'—Brieux, *Maternity*, Act iii., p. 69. *Three Plays*. (Fifield, 1912.)

² C. W. Saleeby, *Woman and Womanhood*, chap. xvii., p. 262.

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the army and navy may still be riddled with contagious disease, yet on the whole it is the strong and the fit who perish by thousands in war, and whose destruction increases the preponderance of women.¹

As to whether late marriages or early are desirable, opinions are divided. 'Almost all thoughtful minds are agreed that sexual morality is almost impossible to men unless they marry early.'² 'There is no doubt,' says C. W. Saleeby, 'that the tendency at present is towards later marriages, and the average age for marriage in England has been rising for many years past.' He regards this fact as implying an injury to the individuals themselves and to society. 'The later the age to which marriage is delayed, the more are men handicapped in their constant struggle to control the racial instinct under the unnatural conditions under which they find themselves.' As far as the offspring are concerned, the

¹ For further information on the physical condition of the Services in the latter half of last century, see evidence given before a Select Committee on the Contagious Diseases Act, 1867-8.

² Ellen Key, *De l'Amour et du Mariage*, p. 234.

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same author states 'that we are at present without anything like conclusive evidence proving that the age of the parents affects the quality of their children.'¹ On the other hand, too often young people rush recklessly into marriage only to discover their mistake. 'Most men arrive late in life at a proper knowledge of their own hearts — others never succeed in doing so.' So also, 'those psychologists whose verdict is worth listening to, who have given much study to woman's nature . . . hold the opinion that it is to woman's advantage to marry late. Men curse the fate which destroys so many unions ; they should curse the fate which drives people to enter prematurely into them.'²

The increased standard of living and the expense of keeping a wife have already been referred to as causes of the modern delays in marrying, but this feature is not confined to civilised countries only. In his *History of Human Marriage*, Professor Westermarck

¹ C. W. Saleeby, *Woman and Womanhood*, chap. xiv.

² Ellen Key, *De l'Amour et du Mariage*.

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refers to the fact that when a traveller asked some primitive tribesmen why they remained single, they replied that they did so 'because their wives were too expensive.' So also among other tribes, the bridegroom must collect a certain sum for the purchase of the bride, and their marriage is thereby retarded.¹ This would be the reply of many bachelors to-day in our own country. As to the sad results of marriages delayed by a deficiency of income, 'as long as salaries continue to be so small and the conditions of life so precarious, more and more will the blood of men become corrupted, more and more will the blood of women become impoverished, while they have to wait for the consummation of a happy marriage which might have bestowed fine healthy children on the community.'² So long as employment is so precarious as it is at present in many trades, the more serious individuals will hesitate before investing in a wife and

¹ Westermarck, *History of Human Marriage*, chap. vii., pp. 143, 144.

² Ellen Key, *De l'Amour et du Mariage*, p. 98.

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family whom an unforeseen accident or misadventure may deprive of the means of subsistence. Too often girls of the middle classes are brought up to a standard of comfort in their own homes which a young man, pushing his way, is unable to offer them. They have not been trained to any profession, and therefore could not add to their husband's income; the result is that they remain unmarried. It cannot be too often insisted upon, that all girls in every class should be brought up to some definite profession. Even if a woman stand in no need of adding to her income, a settled occupation can prove nothing but a blessing to her.¹ Formerly, and indeed until recently, marriage was regarded as the only 'profession' worth the consideration of or fitting for women. If a woman did not succeed in find-

¹ 'Self-maintenance for the woman as well as for the man is merely the primary external pre-requisite to a dignified human existence. The most important step, especially for the future of socialism, is to give every one the opportunity of self-maintenance by means of the work he is best able to do; the work, therefore, which will conduce most to his happiness.' — Ellen Key, *Love and Ethics*, p. 46.

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ing a husband she was regarded as a failure, hence all her time, energies, and talents were to be devoted to the attempt to render herself desirable to man. If this theory had included the recognition of the necessity for a thorough training in the arts of motherhood and housewifery more might be said in its favour. However, it implied nothing of the sort. Very fortunately, thanks to the efforts of pioneers, upon whom the most bitter criticisms were lavished, this attitude is beginning to disappear. A woman with a profession is no longer looked upon askance, or considered as something abnormal and to be avoided. But unfortunately, the greater number of girls in the upper and middle classes grow up without any definite occupation or profession. All women are not adapted to be wives and mothers, and those who are not so adapted may have great capacities in other directions. Heaven knows, there is plenty in all directions to be done by people of every class of intelligence. A husband and children are not the only individuals requiring love and

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attention in this world, nor is it only in the circle of romantic love that absorbing interests are to be found.

From every point of view it is of great advantage to a woman to have an independent income derived from her own work. She will not then be driven into an undesirable marriage as her only alternative. Too often a young girl has never seriously asked herself: 'What will marriage mean to me? Exactly what kind of man should I wish to marry?' 'Too often it is the need to love that one takes for love itself. . . . Too often it is love that a young girl is in love with, not with her lover.'¹ She thinks it would be very delightful to have an 'establishment of her own,' not to be restricted by her family's tastes, income, and wishes: she knows the dreary alternative which faces too many of the women who never marry.² A very clever description is given

¹ Ellen Key, *De l'Amour et du Mariage*, pp. 84 and 236.

² See *The Upholstered Cage*, a very true and interesting presentment of the fate of the single woman.

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by H. G. Wells, in his recent work, *Marriage*, of a young girl who finds herself faced by the prospect of marriage with a man with whom she is not in love. She perceives suddenly of what importance is this step, and how little she is prepared for it. 'Perhaps,' she reflected, 'all marriage was horrid, and one had to get over it. That was rather what her mother had conveyed to her.' That is probably a view of marriage more commonly entertained than people would like to admit: an unpleasant necessity outweighed by compensating advantages.

In old days the purchase of a bride was a recognised custom. To-day, although not openly admitted, it still exists in all its crudeness. It is true that the system of a dowry, in its frank commercialism, is not in practice with us as on the Continent; nevertheless, what do many women do, or what is done on their behalf by their parents, but to sell them to 'the highest bidder'? 'The Greeks regarded a union into which a woman entered without dowry as concubinage rather

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than marriage.’¹ ‘Somebody said openly in Parliament the other day that marriage was the true profession of women. So it is a profession; and except that it is a harder bargain for both parties and that society countenances it, I don’t see how it differs from what we—bless our virtuous indignation!—stigmatise as prostitution.’² Of too many modern marriages is this true, where the woman lives in idle luxury, without children; her only occupation—to make herself attractive at her husband’s expense.

What is the great business of the London ‘Season’ but that of a marriage market, thinly disguised? Young people are ‘thrown together’ with the admitted object of becoming engaged. That detestable creature, the ‘matchmaker,’ is still far from extinct. When an engagement has been successfully manœuvred, it is followed by a fashionable wedding, performed with the solemn benediction of the Church. What is such a wedding very often but the advertisement of

¹ Westermarck, *History of Human Marriage*, chap. xix.

² G. B. Shaw, *The Irrational Knot*, chap. vi., pp. 121, 122.

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a successful bargain struck? Nothing can conceivably be more vulgar or blatant than the advertisement of gifts bestowed, of guests present at the ceremony, of the bride's attire, and of all the paraphernalia connected with the 'sacred' marriage bond. As one of the characters says in a modern play: 'Everything about a wedding is absurd just because it is so detestable.' All this is true of the more well-to-do classes. In the working classes a woman only procures a 'home of her own' at the cost of becoming her own and her husband's general servant, with the additional burden of bearing and then rearing his children.

When one considers all the 'rocks and quicksands that beset married life'—to use a common phrase—one is more inclined to marvel at the phenomenon of a happy and successful marriage than at the number of failures.¹ How tremendous are the odds against happiness!

¹ We hear much of the failure of marriage, but surely the amazing thing is its measure of success under our careless and irresponsible methods.' C. W. Saleeby, *Woman and Womanhood*, chap. xvi., p. 238.

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One frequent cause of unhappiness is that married people know too little of each other beforehand. In this matter the poorer classes are better off than the more well-to-do, who do everything possible to prevent young couples from seeing much of each other. In this country, to be seen too often alone in the company of a young man, unless she be engaged to him, is still fatal to a woman's reputation. But unless she be 'left alone' with him, how in the world is she, unless her instincts be very alert and her intuitive gifts very fully developed, to get to know him? In this respect matters are certainly better than they were: fortunately young people are not now constantly under the supervision of a watchful chaperon. Nevertheless they see far too little of each other, and that little too often under artificial conditions. From this inadequate acquaintance they are transferred into the 'appalling intimacy' of married life—an intimacy so great that it is of itself sufficient to render two people entirely detestable to one another, unless they happen

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to be in absolute affinity. In consequence, some married people admit what probably is the experience of too many, that the first months of their married lives have proved the most miserable of their existence.

The practice of keeping the young in ignorance concerning the physical facts of marriage is answerable for a very great deal of unhappiness. This has been entirely due to notions of false prudery, and it is a cause for the utmost rejoicing that this fact has at last been recognised, and is constantly being inveighed against. A few years ago it would have been impossible to discuss this subject in public or to publish literature dealing with it. Nowadays, in some schools, teachers are regularly appointed to instruct children and young people in what it is needful that they should know concerning their own bodies. This is excellent, but far more desirable and natural would it be that parents should themselves impart this knowledge to their children. In this respect primitive peoples are in advance of ourselves, for they early initiate young girls

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into a knowledge of their physical conditions. 'There is no need to destroy the charm of innocence to remedy certain kinds of ignorance, and prudery and modesty are not identical! I am by no means in favour of imparting matters of sex to the young; but if they are going to school, or if they ask questions, there are certain things that should be told to them to save them from having those facts communicated to them in a filthy manner. A little girl of nine of my acquaintance was going to school for the first time, and her mother thought it advisable to tell her the facts of life as far as she could understand them. When she had finished, the child flung her arms round her mother and said, "Then I was quite close under your heart from the very beginning, mummy!" Any dirty suggestion made to that child afterwards would have been like water on a duck's back.'¹

A child may be trusted to discover the latent poetry and beauty in any situation,

¹ Dr. Jane Walker; see *Pall Mall Gazette*, November 28th, 1912.

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moreover, a child's mind readily acquiesces in natural facts; what has been familiar to us since our youth seems reasonable and right. It is the withholding of such knowledge and the surrounding of all that concerns birth and marriage with a mystery—treating it as something unclean and unfit, that attracts the mind of youth to it with morbid curiosity. A doctor in Brieux's play, *Damaged Goods*, says to a man with whom he is discussing this question, 'So you think that by ignoring these curiosities you stifle them? Why, every boy and girl who has been to a boarding-school knows you do not! So far from stifling them, you drive them to satisfy themselves in secret by any vile means they can. There is nothing vile in the act that reproduces life by the means of love. But for the benefit of our children we organize round about it a gigantic conspiracy of silence. A respectable man will take his son and daughter to one of these grand music-halls, where they will hear things of the most loathsome description; but he won't let them hear a word spoken seriously

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on the subject of the great act of love. No, no! not a word about that without blushing. The mystery and humbug in which physical facts are enveloped ought to be swept away and young men be given some pride in the creative power with which each one of us is endowed. They ought to be made to understand that the future of the race is in their hands, and to be taught to transmit the great heritage which they have received from their ancestors intact with all its possibilities to their descendants.¹ 'Thoreau said truly that the subject of marriage would not be so often avoided in a pure society, but treated "naturally and simply." There can be no better safeguard for the purity of the mass than this natural and simple method of dealing with the sex passion. It is the death-blow to prurient and uncleanly ideas; it is the only way to elevate that which morbid asceticism and loathsome vulgarity have attempted to dishonour and degrade.² 'By

¹ Brieux, *Damaged Goods*, Act III.

² Geoffrey Mortimer, 'The Work of Havelock Ellis,' *Westminster Review*, vol. clviii., p. 542 (1902).

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treating all questions relating to love in a more beautiful and more healthy way, little by little the nervous system will be fortified, the unbalanced imagination will be quieted, unhealthy curiosity will be calmed, and the sense of responsibility towards the individual himself and towards the coming generation will be deepened to such an extent that a premature sexual life will lose its attraction for young people.’¹

The present writer, in reading the quaint legend of the Garden of Eden, has often thought that if the attention of ‘our first parents’ had not been so conspicuously drawn to the Tree of Knowledge, if no penalty had been attached to the eating of its fruit, they would very likely have passed it by unnoticed. People in general do not exhibit any such very keen desire to partake of the Tree of Knowledge now that its fruit is placed within the reach of all! It appears to be an unfailing peculiarity with human beings, that whatever is put beyond their reach acquires for that

¹ Ellen Key, *De l'Amour et du Mariage*, p. 89.

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very reason a peculiar charm. It is that very quality of curiosity and of the desire to obtain whatever is withheld which, in its nobler aspects, has led men to accomplish their greatest deeds of adventure.

If children be reverently and early taught the mystery and wonder of their own bodies, their minds will not dwell on the subject, and they will regard such matters as healthily and naturally as any other law of life. 'I want to see if I can't teach boys that they are *not* individuals—not unrelated atoms in a random universe. Teach them that they live in a world of law—of evolution by law—that they are links, every one of them, in a splendid chain that has been running since life began, and will run on to the end of time. Knock into their heads that no chain is stronger than its weakest link, and that this *means them*. Don't you see what a powerful socialising force there is in the sense of personal responsibility, if cultivated in the right direction? A boy may be willing to take his chances on going to the bad—economically and socially,

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as well as morally—if he thinks that it is only his own personal concern. But he will hesitate if you impress upon him that, in doing so, he is blocking the whole magnificent procession. My plan would be to develop these boys' social efficiency by stamping upon them the knowledge that the very humblest of them holds a trusteeship of cosmic importance.'¹

In no direction perhaps has the ingratitude of man been more vividly displayed than in this 'ascetic' and morbid attitude towards that marvel of marvels—his own body! He who can call his body 'vile' must be very ignorant of its workings and ever-developing powers. If some men's bodies are vile, it is because they have rendered them so by misuse. We make machines and employ all our ingenuity in improving them, in keeping them in good repair: how little do we expend on that miraculous mechanism—our brain!

The ascetic attitude tends to retard the evolution of the body by regarding it as an

¹ Henry Sydnor Harrison, *Queed*, chap. xxiv., pp. 308-9. (Constable & Co., 1911.)

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impediment to, rather than an adjunct in, spiritual progress.

‘Let us not always say
“Spite of this flesh to-day
I strove, made head, gained ground upon
the whole!”
As the bird wings and sings,
Let us cry, “All good things
Are ours, nor soul helps flesh more, now,
than flesh helps soul!”’¹

Man stands only to gain by an added reverence for his body and a recognition of its uses. He will thereby more clearly perceive the perils of misuse. Let him conceive of it no longer as his enemy, but as his friend.

Our morality has hitherto been a failure, because we have had no lofty motive to encourage it. Since the motive is the heart of an action, it follows that only on lofty motives can lofty action follow. ‘Unselfishness’ will be the motive of the new morality.

Too long has the theory been upheld that

¹ Robert Browning, *Rabbi Ben Ezra*.

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Earth is a vale of tears through which mankind must pass as a bitter trial. Apart from violent damage done by the forces of nature, every evil that is complained of on earth is brought about by humanity itself, and therefore has its remedy, and this remedy humanity itself must work. 'The misfortunes of marriage are no exception !

As with most other evils, very often selfishness is a principal cause. People ask too much in comparison with what they are prepared to give. Often after marriage they are not particular enough about trifles, and when all is said and done, life, if diluted, will be found to be largely composed of 'trifles' !

Then men, in particular, make the mistake of caring far too much for outward appearances, and women, knowing this, have bestowed too much of their time and talents on producing these. Most of the faults which are specially laid at the door of womankind are the results of her efforts to conform to man's ideal of her in the past !

We will not endeavour here to weigh the

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relative failings of men and women.* Fortunately men are beginning to formulate a new ideal for their wives. It is still said that men prefer women who are not too intelligent.† This may have been so in the past, we doubt if it is still the case, but if it be so, well, the problem is easily solved.

‘Oh,’ it is said, ‘if women are going to take up professions, all your clever women will remain unmarried. When a woman becomes absorbed in a profession, she thinks twice before throwing it up in order to marry.

* ‘There is nothing more futile than to try to prove the inferiority of woman to man, unless it be to try and prove her equality.’—Ellen Key, *Love and Ethics*, p. 44.

† Of the heroine in a modern American novel, the author writes: ‘Few of the young men she danced with thought her clever, and this shows how clever she really was. For there are men in this world who will run ten city blocks in any weather to avoid talking to a woman who knows more than they do, and knows it, and shows that she knows that she knows it.’—Henry Sydnor Harrison, *Queed*, chap. ix., p. 108.

‘It is often argued by those who wish to maintain women in a servile condition, that her intellectual development is the natural foe of her charm; in other words, that men don’t like clever women. It is an exploded idea.’—W. L. George, *Woman and To-morrow*, chap. vi. p. 179. (Herbert Jenkins, 1912.)

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Only brainless women will be available as wives.' There are several answers to this objection. First, it would be a good thing if all women thought twice, even three times, before embarking on matrimony. As it is, they do not think nearly enough! Then a really clever woman knows that wifehood and motherhood—the latter in particular—will afford scope for all her talents. It is because the occupations of wifehood and motherhood have been belittled that people think clever women will despise them. The great field open to women as really competent mothers has been too much ignored. But if men really prefer to marry women with undeveloped or small brains, the problem is, as we say, easily solved. Let the clever women help the world by working at their different professions, and let the non-brainy ones marry the men who prefer them! Happily there is no fear of any such contingency. In reality men are beginning to appreciate intelligence and competence in women, and to demand of their wives that they shall be companions and

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friends in addition. 'When love depends entirely on external attractions, it is necessarily fickle; but when it implies sympathy arising from mental qualities, there is a tie between husband and wife which lasts long after youth and beauty are gone.'¹

It is very remarkable how much longer people retain their youth than was the case some years ago. In the last century we read of men and women who were considered 'old' at forty. At thirty a woman was supposed to be entirely *passée*. How different is the case now, when it is often observable that young men prefer the society of women much older than themselves.² It is only another example of the effects of that mysterious influence, *The General - Opinion - of - What Things-Ought-To-Be*. People were expected to grow old at forty, and they did so. Now forty is regarded as the prime of life.

The Feminist Movement is a movement

¹ Westermarck, *History of Human Marriage*, chap. xxi., p. 502.

² See Jean Finot, *Préjugé et Problème de Sexes*, p. 391.

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for the full development of woman's powers and possibilities, which too long have been repressed and even suffocated. Men stand only to gain by the results of such a movement, and the cleverest amongst them have realised this fact and lend it their support.

It is true that the more cultured people become, the harder are they to please in their partners, the more susceptible are they to their failings, the more do they demand of marriage. Surely that is nothing to lament over! 'To-day, young couples endure unhappiness in marriage less well than in the past—a proof of how much more exacting they are in this direction. . . . The more exacting does love become, the more likelihood is there that it will continue faithful.'¹

'You must not ask too much of poor human nature!' So people say. On the contrary, we should ask *everything* of it. Ask, and it shall be given. The fault in the past has been that people have asked too little.

¹ Ellen Key, *De l'Amour et du Mariage*, pp. 218 and 226.

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‘At that rate people will become so particular that hardly any one will marry.’ Do not believe it! A finer race of men and women will arise, asking for more and prepared to give more also. And it is far better that people should be too particular than not particular enough. As Ellen Key says: ‘The woman of the future will be charming, but her charm will be a different one from that of women in the past. To every age its customs, to every age its differing men and women. We cannot demand that humanity alone of all created beings shall never vary or evolve.’

‘It is the desire of every soul to experience the highest happiness.’¹ Human beings seek happiness as instinctively as rivers seek the sea. But in what does happiness consist? Is it not always in the satisfaction of some inward hunger? Man’s spiritual nature will never be appeased by that which satisfies his physical hunger only. As all material things are transitory, so the happiness caused by

¹ Ellen Key, *Love and Ethics*, p. 21.

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material things must of necessity be transient also. This is equally true of the happiness sought in marriage. True happiness is to be found only in the human heart. Let it be remembered that many people who have found unhappiness in married life would very likely have been unhappy, though differently unhappy, had they remained single. The tragedy of failure in marriage is that of two individuals who irretrievably aggravate and accentuate each other's unhappiness.

The present indissolubility of marriage is one potent cause of its unpopularity. The clergy would do well to consider whether the present unpopularity of marriage—which they deplore and denounce—has not some intimate connection with the indissolubility of marriage—which they uphold and strive to enforce.

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CHAPTER VIII.

THERE appear to be two large classes of individuals in this world, of whom one think that everything in the nature of reform or change *must* be wrong: the other that it *must* be right. These two classes represent the law of opposites, of which attraction and repulsion, cold and heat, height and depth are familiar instances. We might roughly describe these two extremes of thought as representing the *Push* and *Pull* elements in civilisation, corresponding to the propeller and the brake.

Certain it is that there is 'no condition of things so bad but it finds some to advocate its perpetuation.'¹ Every single reform whereby mankind has benefited has met with opposition—the greater its importance, the greater this opposition has been. 'Our eyes are holden

¹ Havelock Ellis, *The Task of Social Hygiene*, chap. vi., p. 193.

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that we cannot see things that stare us in the face until the hour arrives when the mind is ripened; then we behold them, and the time when we saw them not is like a dream.' ¹

Opposition, therefore, to so far-reaching a reform as the reconstruction of the marriage laws is exactly what experience leads us to expect.

Let us examine the principal arguments advanced by the '*Pull*' party against reform in the marriage laws.

The first and greatest objection put forward is that divorce is *contrary to the Law of Christ*. Whether or not divorce be beneficial to Humanity is, to those who hold this view, of no account whatsoever. For them Christ was divine, therefore any utterance of his must stand for all time as final. Neither is the fact that an unending controversy has raged round the question of what Christ actually did ordain in this matter of any account in their eyes. They have decided that he condemned divorce,

¹ Emerson, *Essay on Spiritual Laws*.

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and therefore, to them, it stands for ever condemned.

‘The duty of Church people,’ said Lord Halifax, addressing a meeting on September 30th, 1912, ‘was to obey the Church’s laws whatever the consequences. After the experience of the past, no one could doubt that it was the duty of Church people, whatever Parliament or the Law Courts might say, to see that the law of the Church was maintained and defended at all costs. As to divorce, it was no kindness or advantage to the poor to place within their reach greater facilities for that which experience had shown was a cause of demoralisation and misery to the rich. Instead of extending such facilities to the poor, the existing facilities for divorce should be taken away from the rich. Investigation has shown that in the interests of the happiness of the greater number, the strictness of the marriage law should be increased rather than relaxed, and that facilities for divorce should be diminished rather than extended. A strict marriage law was at once the safeguard of

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the family and the safeguard of the happiness of the individuals who composed it.'¹ 'The suggestion of giving extended facilities for divorce is contrary to the teaching of Christianity and particularly to the teaching of our Lord.'² 'The State has already departed in its marriage legislation from the principles of the Church. But these are principles which the Church cannot surrender, for they are laid upon its loyalty by the Lord himself.'³

These are the views of Church people, and their right to insist on their retention for their own members no one will dispute. Their right to refuse reform for the State at large, happily, is non-existent. 'In any event it is too late for any contention founded upon interpretations of the New Testament or upon sacramental religious views to be taken into account in any discussion in this country. It is perfectly true that these views are, and will be, responsible in a great measure for opposition

¹ Viscount Halifax at Middlesboro', Sept. 30th, 1912.

² Mr. Talbot Baines; see *Morning Post*, November 19th, 1912.

³ The Archbishop of York, on October 1st, 1912.

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to reform, but from the logical point of view they must be ruled out of the discussion. . . . Once the legislature has admitted the principle that marriage is a civil contract, which can be validly performed by a layman without religious rites, and dissolved by a civil judge without ecclesiastical sanction, it is submitted that the authority of the Church to intervene or to enforce its views on religious grounds, is already gone. 'The question must in future be treated as any other question of social reform needs to be treated, as part of the moral and social well-being of the people as a whole, without allowing the issue to be obscured by the haze of any ecclesiastical tradition.' In the words of Edward Carpenter, 'the negative Christian dispensation is rapidly approaching its close; Christianity has been fatal to love, and it has concentrated the thoughts of men on their individual salvation—the salvation of their souls.' Of it and of commercial civilisation he says further that 'though they may have had their uses and their parts to play in the history of mankind, they have been fatal to the com-

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munal spirit in society, and they have been fatal to the glad expression of the soul in private life.'¹

It is of no use to argue with those who raise the objection of Christian precedent in opposition to reform. 'They will never admit that 'no truth is so sublime but what it may be trivial to-morrow in the light of new thoughts,' nor that so far as people are unsettled in their opinions is there any hope for them.'² 'They meet all arguments with the reply that 'it was said by them of old time.'

The second objection raised against the facilitation of divorce is that *the foundations of morality will be sapped*. As we have already shown, the foundations of morality were long ago sapped by the teaching of orthodox Christianity, in that it debased, first, the regard for love by considering the body as unclean (holding, as St. Paul did, that 'in the flesh dwelleth no good thing'); secondly,

¹ Edward Carpenter, *The Drama of Love and Death*, pp. 31 and 50.

² See Emerson, *Essay on Circles*.

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marriage, by treating it as a 'remedy against sin;' and, thirdly, woman as being a creature inferior to man, who imperilled his salvation by her wiles and who must be kept in subjection by him. This objection is therefore so futile that it is hardly worth opposing. Some individuals, however, admit that the morality of this country is at a low ebb, and their argument is that facilities for divorce would increase rather than lessen immorality. Let us, therefore, see whether the experience of the past has been such as to justify their apprehension.

'In many of the islands of the Indian Archipelago, divorce may, by law or custom, be readily obtained, but . . . it is very rarely sued for.' In China and in Japan, where divorce is easily obtained, there is little demand for it.¹ 'In Connecticut, notwithstanding the liberty of divorce, or in consequence of it, there is no State in the Union in which domestic felicity and purity, un-

¹ Westermarck, *History of Human Marriage*, p. 522, *et seq.*

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blemished morals and matrimonial concord and virtue more abound.’¹ In ancient Rome, where there was every facility for divorce, it was nevertheless almost unknown.

Lord Russell’s opinion is ‘that even the extremest percentage — about forty divorces per thousand marriages or four per cent.—in countries with lenient laws cannot surely be taken as evidence of the existence of a very dangerous condition of society. Or, if it be so taken, we ourselves, who have the strictest laws and therefore the fewest recorded divorces of any country, must be in an equally bad condition; for this four per cent. is the measure of our superiority. Again, two contiguous countries, such as Belgium and France, both with very wide laws, record percentages respectively of fourteen and twenty-four divorces per thousand marriages.’²

Past experience proves that repressive marriage laws tend to encourage immorality

¹ S. B. Kitchin, *A History of Divorce*, chap. x.

² Earl Russell, *Divorce*, chap. v., page 71.

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rather than to prevent it. The majority of the members of the recent Divorce Commission gave it as their opinion that 'far from such reforms as we recommend tending to lower the standard of morality and regard for the sanctity of the marriage tie, we consider that reform is necessary in the interest of morality, as well as in the interest of justice; and in the general interests of Society and the State.'¹

Let us ask ourselves in what way the withholding of facilities for divorce can possibly make for morality?

In the first place, the only justification of marriage is mutual love, and 'a man can no more promise to love or not to love than he can promise not to grow old. What he can promise is to keep a watch over his life and over his love.'² The charm of love consists in its entire freedom. We may be able to command or to buy obedience, but the richest man on earth cannot buy love. It is as free as air,

¹ *Divorce Commission Report*, 1912, p. 37.

² Ellen Key, *De l'Amour et du Mariage*, p. 231.

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and entirely beyond the reach of the will. Therefore 'no love can be bound by oath or covenant to secure it against a higher love.'¹

The sanctity of marriage consists in the presence of love; where that love no longer exists, its sanctity has departed and it becomes merely an outward bond. 'It is futile to force upon an individual a union which has ceased to be sacred: hence one must take real love as the true moral basis of marriage, or else one must abandon the theory of absolute fidelity as the criterion of morality.'² Fidelity which is only guaranteed by law, whether religious or civil, has no moral value whatsoever. 'Fidelity which rests on the traditional feeling of duty has no more solidity than that which a safety ladder made of straw can afford in the hour of danger.'³ Nor can that which can be claimed as a right ever have the value of that which is bestowed as a gift. It is for this reason

¹ Emerson, *Essay on Circles*.

² Ellen Key, *De l'Amour et du Mariage*, p. 15.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

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that 'gratitude for a great love has often shown itself more effectively in a free union than in one ratified by law. A man with a sensitive conscience will be more bound by the ties of a free union than by a legal one, because his choice has been a more personal one, hence more decisive than had it only been dictated by tradition.'¹ The nobility of man is nowhere more evidently displayed than in this characteristic—that he feels a greater obligation in a bond which is not enforced by law, for the reason that a moral obligation springs from personal conviction. As an instance of this fact, a couple of natives in the Seychelles Islands had lived happily together for many years, although their union had never been ratified by the law or by the Church. A Catholic priest, being very anxious to remedy this omission, persuaded them to come to the church and be married. Accordingly there was a great ceremony, their own grandchildren playing the part of bridesmaids. A few months after

¹ Ellen Key, *De l'Amour et du Mariage*, p. 244.

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the couple appeared in Court to demand a divorce!

It is well known that some of the happiest unions in this world were never 'sanctioned' by the Church or by law. The children of love-unions, too, are often superior both physically and mentally to the offspring of ordinary marriages — some celebrated historical examples of this fact were Leonardo da Vinci, Alexander Hamilton, and Erasmus, who were all 'love-children.' At the same time it must not be imagined that all illegitimate children are the fruit of love-unions, quite the reverse: 'they result in the main from haphazard connections lightly entered into.' Very often illegitimate offspring are inferior to others because of the hardships and anxieties undergone by their mothers.¹

The direct result of compelling people to continue in legal unions which have become hateful to them is, that they enter into illegal connections, and as such connections must be kept dark as far as possible, the result is not

¹ Burdach, *Traité de Physiologie*.

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only to encourage immorality, but deceit and hypocrisy also. A man must pretend an absolute disapproval of immorality even while indulging in it himself.

When the question of Divorce Reform was brought before the House of Commons in 1857 it was met by violent protestations that the morality of the country would be undermined. As the Member for West Surrey pointed out, adultery had been stated in that very House to be of itself a dissolution of marriage; 'if that were so, how many men in that House were married?'¹ Following the verdict of Christ, that every man who looked at a woman to lust after her had committed adultery with her in his heart, how many of those who to-day are loudest in their denunciations of immorality on religious grounds can be acquitted before the inward tribunal of their conscience? 'It is often assumed,' writes Lord Russell, 'that these relaxations of the legal tie and extensions of divorce will lead

¹ *Hansard*, vol. 147, p. 1267.

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to loose conduct on the part of the community. This line of argument is based on a profound misapprehension, viz. that individuals are guided in their conduct by the law and not by their own feelings and dispositions. In the case of a person of definite religious beliefs, or a person in whom unformulated aspirations and ideals take the place of religious beliefs, conduct is regulated by an individual ethical standard, and the law is conformed to, either because it falls far short of the requirements of the ethical standard, or in matters of no moral importance for the sake of convenience. . . . As a consequence of the present law immorality is rampant, and flourishes unchecked by a healthy public opinion.’¹

In the Report of the Divorce Commission, the following opinion is expressed by the majority of the Commissioners: ‘It is material to refer to this, having regard to the suggestion by some of the witnesses, that to

¹ Earl Russell, ‘When should Marriage be dissolved?’ *The English Review*, p. 138. (August, 1912).

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afford further facilities for divorce will lower the standard of morality, and respect for the sanctity of the marriage tie in this country. After a very careful consideration of all that has been brought before us, our conclusion is that the weight of the evidence which has been given before this Commission is to *the contrary effect*.¹

The greatest injustice of the present Divorce Law is, that it places relief entirely beyond the reach of the poor, and society, after having driven many poor people directly into immoral relations, then passes the harshest judgments on the results of such connections, often driving the unfortunate parents to commit suicide or infanticide and other anti-social crimes.

The third argument opposed to facilitations for divorce is that *there is no real demand for it in this country*; that the poor, on whom the present laws press hardest, do not apply for divorce, and in fact do not want it. The poor, we may say with equal reason,

¹ *Divorce Commission Report*, 1912, p. 42.

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do not ask for the moon either, because it is beyond their reach. 'The cost of bringing or defending a suit in London and having the hearing there renders it quite impossible for many of the poorer classes to get the relief which those better off obtain.'¹ Therefore we need not wonder if there are not many applications for divorce amongst them.

That there is no demand for reform amongst the poor is untrue. 'Letters on the subject have been constantly received by the late President of the Divorce Court from poor people urging reform in this matter and protesting against the injustice to them of the present system.'²

The poor have not the same means for demanding reforms or for asserting their rights. Publicity nowadays is mostly by means of the Press, and such publicity costs money. We are told in the Divorce Commission Report that an inquiry was made amongst members

¹ *Divorce Commission Report*, 1912, p. 38.

² *Ibid.*, p. 38.

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of the Mothers' Union, as to whether greater facilities for divorce would tend to lessen the binding character of the marriage tie amongst the poor. 'An aggregate of 85,491 votes of working mothers have been recorded.' The majority replied in the affirmative, a few in the negative, and some considered that 'respect for the marriage tie scarcely existed among the very lowest class, and therefore could not be lessened.'

The results of this inquiry may surprise us, until we discover exactly what is the nature of the Society that was canvassed. The objects of the Mothers' Union are: 'To uphold the sanctity of marriage and to awaken in mothers of all classes a sense of their great responsibilities as mothers in the training of their children.' It is 'a Church of England Society, founded on the Bible and on the Prayer-book as proved by the Bible, and is under the patronage of the Archbishops and Bishops and works on Church lines.' The conditions of membership are: faith in the divinity of Jesus Christ; members must have

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kept their marriage vow inviolate ; must have their children baptized.

Hence, we cannot regard their evidence as unbiassed or as having reference to the community at large. As the Report truly remarks : ' their views appear to be affected by the ecclesiastical aspect of the question of divorce, and by their connection with those who hold views on religious grounds as to the indissolubility of marriage.'

On the other hand, when the members of the Women's Co-operative Guild, (consisting almost entirely of ' happily married women of the working classes '), were questioned as to the desirability of equality of treatment of the sexes in the matter of divorce and as to the advantages of cheap divorce, by a great majority they replied in favour of both.

Another very frequent argument that is advanced against any relaxation of the present laws is : *that the children will suffer by it.* As Earl Russell says : ' One would like to have exact particulars of the exact modes in which they suffer. It is not surely supposed that it

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is to their advantage to grow up in an atmosphere of domestic broils and unseemly dissensions.'¹

In point of fact, 'a divorce obtained for incompatibility of temper is generally an advantage to the children. . . . They cease to be an object of discord between the father and mother; the necessity of taking part against one or the other is removed; they are no longer dragged asunder by the force of two opposing wills, two jealous hearts, each of which strives to win them; they escape, in part, from the dangers of a contradictory education, where each parent endeavours to combat the ideas inculcated by the other.'²

Children, as is well known, usually form a great bond between their parents, and 'the birth of children is generally the best guarantee for the continuance of the marriage tie.'³

As an instance of this fact, we are told that in Switzerland two-fifths of the total number

¹ Earl Russell, *Divorce*, p. 177.

² Ellen Key, *De l'Amour et du Mariage*, p. 250.

³ Westermarck, *History of Human Marriage*, chap. xxiii., p. 530.

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of divorces take place between married people who have had no children.

‘In all societies this is an important factor which has great effect among even rude peoples. Faulkner remarks that though the Patagonian marriages “are at will, yet when the parties are agreed and have children, they seldom forsake each other even in extreme old age.”’¹

Therefore we may be sure it is only in the extremes of unhappiness that couples with children desire to separate, or else when one parent or both are indifferent to them, in which case one does see how their position would be affected for the worse. For one thing, children who grow up in an atmosphere of dissension are not very likely to form a high ideal of the marriage state.

Then, again, although the responsibility incurred by parents in having children can hardly be exaggerated, the happiness of the children should not be considered to the entire

¹ Herbert Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, vol. i., chap. xii., p. 754.

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exclusion of their parents. If children have their rights, parents also have theirs. 'The idea that the great and primal object of union is to be sought in the *next generation* has something unsatisfactory about it. Why not in this generation? Why should the blessedness of mankind always be deferred to posterity?'¹ 'Too often people are only occupied with the thought of the children. It is forgotten that the parents deserve to be considered as an end.' A human being cannot attain to full development in an atmosphere of chronic dissension and misunderstanding, his moral character must suffer from it. 'There are individuals who suffer under unhappy conditions in marriage 'to such a degree that life loses all its value in their eyes, and it is those who are driven into adultery or divorce.'²

So much for the interests of the parents, and for the children already born when divorce is discussed. But what possible benefit do the

¹ Edward Carpenter, *The Drama of Love and Death*, chap. iv., p. 61.

² Ellen Key, *De l'Amour et du Mariage*, p. 220.

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opposers of reform suggest is gained by the children who are born of unhappy marriages? It is noteworthy that from the religious point of view this aspect of the question is practically ignored.

It is of the highest importance that children should be born as the result of love-unions. 'When parents have an aversion for each other, their offspring is inferior; their children are not so intelligent or so apt.' This is the evidence of Burdach in his *Traité de Physiologie*. It has also been affirmed scientifically that the state of the parents at the moment of conception is of extreme importance to the child.¹ 'Of course, children born of love-matches are as a rule good specimens of the race. They are often particularly beautiful and healthy children, and that is because love is one of the greatest gifts of nature to man and woman to carry on the race.'² Not only so, but a child whose parents are happily united is likely to be the

¹ See J. F. Nisbet, *Marriage and Heredity*.

² Dr. Ethel Vaughan Sawyer, *Pall Mall Gazette*, September 4th, 1912.

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object of far greater love and devotion, on account of their love for each other, as well as on its own.

Moreover, every woman should have perfect freedom in deciding whether she wishes for a child or not. That women should be forced to bear children when they do not want them is a relic of barbarism. Very often women who have been compelled to have children after they cease to desire them are indifferent to them—little wonder that they sometimes feel an absolute aversion to them. ‘Science must make woman, the owner, the mistress of herself. Science must put it in the power of woman to decide for herself whether she will or will not become a mother. This is the solution of the whole question. This frees woman. The babes that are then born will be welcome; they will be clasped with glad hands to happy breasts; they will fill homes with light and joy.’¹

It is not here possible to enter into an

¹ See *Neo-Malthusianism and Eugenics*, p. 23: quotation from Col. R. G. Ingersoll. (William Bell, London, 1912.)

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exhaustive consideration of the grounds upon which divorce should be granted. There are, however, some causes on which at this stage of the world's scientific enlightenment one would have imagined there could be little disagreement. The recent Report of the Divorce Commission, however, proves that this is far from being the case.

Habitual Drunkenness, for instance. Apart from the indignity and suffering caused by being forcibly united with one whose moral character alcoholism has degraded, it is well known that the taking of alcohol by either parent, but by the mother in particular, is *poisonous* in its effects on the offspring. As Ellen Key says: Moses omitted one commandment of the deepest importance, viz. 'Thou shalt honour thy child, even before its birth.'¹ The pre-natal influence of alcohol on a child is highly detrimental. A great deal of infant mortality is due to drinking on the part of parents, and the comparatively low rate of mortality among Jewish children is attributed

¹ Ellen Key, *De l'Amour et du Mariage*, p. 97.

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to 'the practically complete immunity of their parenthood from alcohol.'¹

In the Majority Report of the Divorce Commission we find it stated that, in the case both of the father and of the mother, 'the ruin of the children can be traced to parental example.'² Notwithstanding these widely-known facts, we find the Minority Report expresses the following opinion: 'We regard the present time as a peculiarly unsuitable one for making habitual drunkenness a ground for the dissolution of marriage.'³ This Report is widely supported by those very individuals who regard the facilitating of divorce as likely to be highly injurious to the welfare of children. We should be glad to know in what way children are likely to benefit by the possession of and the example of an habitually drunken parent? In J. F. Nisbet's *Marriage and Heredity*, an instance is given of a child whose father was drunk at the

¹ C. W. Saleeby, *Woman and Womanhood*. See chapter entitled, 'The Chief Enemy of Women.'

² *Divorce Commission Report*, 1912, p. 109.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

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moment of its conception, with the result that it was deaf and semi-idiotic.¹ In view of the fearful dangers incurred by drunken parenthood, one would have imagined that divorce for habitual drunkenness was the least relief that might be conceded.

With respect to the granting of divorce on the grounds of *insanity*, the Minority Report of the Divorce Commission states that 'there is no consensus of evidence of any great demand for divorce on the ground of insanity'—and instead of deploring the fact, advances it as an objection to granting relief. In turning to the Report of the Majority of the Commissioners, however, we find that in their opinion 'the demand for relief in a large series of cases is very pressing.'²

It is to be hoped that the time is rapidly approaching when the rights of parenthood will be prohibited to any one suffering from any form of mental deficiency or of lunacy, and also that public opinion may become so

¹ Chap. viii., p. 126.

² *Divorce Commission Report*, 1912, p. 106.

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enlightened that people so afflicted will voluntarily abstain from marriage. For the time being, however, it seems incredible that any intelligent being should desire to withhold the rights of divorce on the ground of incurable insanity. On the poor the present law is particularly hard. 'The poor man, whose wife is in an asylum for life, must find a housekeeper to manage his home and take care of his children. The woman, who is deprived of her husband, loses a protector and supporter. As a result, irregular unions, immorality, and the production of illegitimate children are inevitable. The wife may, in some instances, be driven to prostitution, the children of the legitimate union are apt to be neglected, and the economic troubles incident to the support of two families may be acute.'¹

It is well known that those afflicted with lunacy and mental nervous maladies are 'almost certain to produce a diseased and bad stock of citizens in the future.'² Never-

¹ *Divorce Commission Report*, 1912, p. 106.

² See evidence of Sir T. Clouston before the same Commission.

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theless, the most ardent upholders of 'morality' seek directly to encourage the production of those who, thanks to their tainted heritage, are almost certain to be mentally and morally deficient.

Lastly, in regard to *cruelty* as a ground for divorce. In reading the recommendations of the Minority Report one is reminded of Ellen Key's forcible remark: 'The talent of being able to endure the sufferings of others has no limits. . . . ' When we consider that the definition of cruelty proposed as a just ground for divorce is 'such conduct by one married person to the other party to the marriage as makes it unsafe, having regard to the risk of life, limb, or health, bodily or mental, for the latter to continue to live with the former,' we perceive that those who object to the granting of relief do indeed possess this talent to perfection. Cruelty has also always included the communication of venereal disease, 'producing sterility and illness and other serious effects on the parties and their children;' nevertheless, the upholders

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of 'morality' would refuse cruelty as a just ground of divorce! One is reminded of the following dialogue:

Doctor. Why don't men do something to improve their lot?

Lawyer. Oh, they try, of course; but all the improvers end in prison or in the mad-house.

Doctor. Who puts them in prison?

Lawyer. All the right-minded, all the respectable.

* * * * *

Doctor. Can this be He?

Poet. It is He—the Crucified.

Doctor. Why—tell me—was He crucified?

Poet. Because He wanted to set free——

Doctor. Who was it—I have forgotten—that crucified him?

Poet. All the right-minded.

Doctor. What a strange world!

* * * * *

Poet. Do you think the right-minded are to be pitied also?

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Doctor. They most of all, perhaps.¹

* * * * *

Before the arrival of Christianity in Europe, Roman law permitted husband and wife to separate by mutual consent. The Patrician class could, if they wished, be married by religious ceremony—‘a sacramental character was thus bestowed on the union and its dissolution was difficult and could be effected only by working the religious ceremony backward in a mode called *Diffarreatio*.’ Living together was taken as evidence of marriage, and when a couple wished to separate in ancient Rome they merely announced their intention of doing so by sending a written message ‘by the hand of a freedman in the presence of seven Roman citizens of full age, containing the words, “Take your property to yourself again.”’²

We may some day return to this enlightened method of procedure. ‘Divorce,’ writes Jean Finot in *Problème et Préjugé des*

¹ August Strindberg, *Dream Play*.

² See Earl Russell, *Divorce*.

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Sexes, 'by the clearly expressed intention of the married couple will become the law in all civilised countries.'¹ Then, again, Herbert Spencer, in his *Principles in Sociology*, writes as follows: 'As monogamy is likely to be raised in character by a public sentiment requiring that the legal bond shall not be entered into unless it represents the natural bond; so perhaps it may be that maintenance of the legal bond will come to be held improper if the natural bond ceases. Already increased facilities for divorce point to the probability that whereas, while permanent monogamy was being evolved, the union by law (originally the act of purchase) was regarded as the essential part of marriage and the union by affection as non-essential; and whereas at present the union by law is thought the more important and the union by affection the less important, there will come a time when the union by affection will be held to be of primary moment and the union by law as of secondary moment; whence reprobation of

¹ Chap. viii., p. 457.

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marital relations in which the union by affection has dissolved.'¹

Surely, when all is said and done, the need for divorce is a matter of private concern, which, from its very nature, cannot be satisfactorily dealt with in public. The more educated people are the more sensitive do they become, and to have to relate in public the intimate details of private life, especially if they are of an unhappy nature, must cause acute suffering. 'Of all actions of a man's life his marriage does least concern other people, yet of all actions of our life, 'tis the most meddled with by other people.' 'Render marriage dissoluble,' was the advice of the same writer, 'and there would be more apparent separations but fewer real ones.'² For, as Milton wrote: 'It is a less breach of wedlock to part with wise and quiet consent betimes, than still to soil and profane that mystery of joy and union with a polluting

¹ Herbert Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, vol. i., p. 753.

² Jeremy Bentham.

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sadness and perpetual distemper ; for it is not the outward continuing of marriage that keeps whole that covenant, but whosoever does most according to peace and love whether in marriage or in divorce, he it is that breaks marriage least ; it being so written that Love only is the fulfilling of every commandment.' He further shows how love is too intimate and too much the result of natural causes to be under the control of law—you cannot command to love — and points out the indecency of discovering physical causes for divorce in public. 'Thus then we see the trial of law, how impertinent it is to this question of divorce, how helpless next, and then how hurtfull.' ¹

The doctrine that marriage is represented by the legal bond, and not by the bond of mutual affection, is the most unspiritual and materialistic view that can possibly be conceived of. To suggest that people will lightly regard their obligations if legal restraint were

¹ John Milton, 'The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce, *Prose Works*, vol. ii.

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removed is a highly degrading conception of humanity. As Lord Russell writes: 'The arguments used against increased freedom for divorce seem sometimes to imply that every married couple in the country are only waiting the opportunity to get rid of each other. The author does not think so meanly of his fellow-creatures, but believes rather that the tie which unites the majority of couples is a tie which is superior to all laws and all requirements of the Divorce Court, and that mutual forgiveness and mutual toleration between the majority of husbands and wives will continue in the future, as it has been in the past, to be the rule of conduct for married life.'¹ Let us also remember that 'those who would separate so light-heartedly were separation made easy for them are precisely those who deceive each other at the present time.' And also, 'that whatever abuses the liberty of divorce may lead to, it seems difficult to admit that they can be more serious than those which have resulted, and still continue

¹ Earl Russell, *Divorce*, p. 183.

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to result from marriage. Marriage is bound up with the most coarse sexual habits, with the most shameless traffic, the most painful martyrdoms, the most cruel ill-usage, to injuries which are destructive of liberty; there is, in fact, no sphere of modern life which is in these respects comparable to it.'¹ We should demand, as a social concession, that 'the dissolution of marriage should be made dependent upon the will of one of the married pair, and that the man and woman should have equal marital rights.'²

It is also very much feared by opponents of divorce and of freedom in marriage conditions that people will not take as much pains to secure happiness in the home, if they realise that they are not bound by the same severe laws. Surely humanity is not so degraded as the supporters of this argument would suggest! Experience shows the contrary to be the case, and that what is bestowed as a gift has far more value than what can be claimed

¹ Ellen Key, *De l'Amour et du Mariage*, pp. 216 and 244.

² Ellen Key, *Love and Ethics*, p. 23.

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as a right. The very fact that an individual knows the law will protect him from the consequences of his actions, renders him careless in his behaviour after marriage, or *vice versa*—if a woman is aware that her husband's fidelity is dependent on her charms and merits alone, such knowledge will be a strong incentive to her to continue exerting them.

Absolute freedom in regard to marriage does not, as people seem to imagine, imply the rejection of marriage. 'The greatest facilities for divorce do not destroy the necessity for marriage.'¹ The institution of marriage is necessary, in order that the parents may assume responsibility for the children whom they have brought into the world. What the promoters of the New Morality propose is that marriage shall not be regarded, as at present, valid only by reason of a legal or religious ceremony, but that the union by affection shall be held 'to be of primary moment.' What they demand

¹ Jean Finot, *Problème et Préjugé de Sexes*.

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and desire is, not that the conception of marriage shall be degraded, but rather that it shall be uplifted, and it can only be uplifted if the moral obligation be substituted for the legal.

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CHAPTER IX.

RELAXATION of the severity of the marriage laws will not (except indirectly) serve to raise the standard of our morality, although, as a result of such relaxation, immorality will not receive direct encouragement as at present. Indirectly morality *will* be improved, for people realising that the legal bond may be more easily dissolved will do all in their power to strengthen the bonds of affection.

Hitherto, also, where men are concerned, immorality on their part has been protected by the law, in so far as it refuses to grant a woman relief for her husband's adultery unless coupled with cruelty. However, public opinion has now advanced to the extent of seeing that equality of treatment must be conceded to men and women at the hands of the law.

Since the weight of public opinion looms

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so large in the lives of most people, the fear of exposure will probably act as a deterrent to many men. In Brieux's Play, *Maternity*, one woman says to another, 'You despise people and yet you sacrifice everything to their opinion.' 'Yes,' replies the other, 'because everything depends upon their opinion. One must be a very exceptional person to be able to defy public opinion.' In considering this attitude we must remember that the 'everything' of many people—*i.e.* everything that is of value in their eyes—worldly and business success, the acquisition of money and power, these *are* largely dependent upon people's opinion. The fear of public opinion is not an exalted motive, nevertheless it is unfortunately a powerful and almost universal one. The advice of Socrates is disregarded—'we must not think so much of what the many will say of us; we must think of what the one man, who understands right and wrong, and of what Truth herself will say of us.'

It is because the law acts as a deterrent

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merely that we must not look to it as a moral reformer. True moral reform can only spring from a conviction that certain courses are wrong and from their consequent rejection. If we ask ourselves for a true definition of 'wrong'—we find it to be, whatever is detrimental to the progress and well-being (in the largest sense) of Humanity.

The present is a period of deep unrest and probing. Humanity is unsatisfied with the existing solution of its problems, and ardently seeks a fresh one. As Eucken so clearly shows, the fact that humanity is rejecting the present forms of religion, does not prove that it is indifferent to religion. To-day, religion 'stands in the very centre of life, produces differences of opinion to the point of the bitterest conflict, makes its voice heard in the treatment of every circumstance and exerts an immense power alike in affirmation and negation. For the modern denial is not of the kind which calmly shelves religion as something decayed and obsolete; on the contrary, the violently passionate

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nature of the attack shows clearly enough that religion is still something very real, powerful, and effective. Perhaps even the denial itself frequently signifies, not so much a complete rejection of religion, as a desire for another and simpler type of religion more adapted to the needs of the day. . . . When religion is handicapped by so much that is obsolete and foreign, when the eternal truths are often obscured by the débris of thousands of years, religion cannot develop its full power with confidence of victory. . . . Religion urgently requires a thoroughgoing revision, an energetic demonstration of its denominating characteristics, a rejection of everything which has become withered and decayed.'¹

It is true that we also often hear people nowadays advocating a return to Paganism. 'Is religion really a necessity to human beings?' they ask. They are enamoured of Greek civilisation and think we

¹ Rudolf Eucken, *Main Currents of Modern Thought*, pp. 70 and 47.

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could not do better than return to the solution of life which was offered by ancient Greece in the days of her glory. Now, if one thing is certain, it is that Humanity cannot with advantage retrace its steps. It can with great advantage study the theories and the civilisations of the Past, and in so doing can weigh their merits against their failings. Both Paganism and Christianity have failed in their ultimate effort of furnishing a satisfying solution to the problem of life: let us ask ourselves why?

The Greek theory of life was the exact opposite of the Christian theory. To the Christian the world is a place of fiery trial, from which he must strive to emerge purified from his weakness; he must not look for happiness there, it is 'very evil,' 'a land of woe, of gloom and strife.' Physical beauty is a 'snare,' he must regard the glories of earth as 'dross.' Hence Christianity has been the most consistent enemy of Art, and the result of its attitude towards temporal beauty has been the most amazing production of

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ugliness in every department of life of which it is possible to conceive. It is true that when the temporal power of the Church was at its zenith, during the Middle Ages, Art prospered exceedingly, but the reason is obvious. Spiritual Christianity was then at its lowest ebb, and all that the Church professed to teach was openly disregarded.

To the Christian, his spiritual and his physical nature are constantly at strife—are ‘contrary one to the other’; hence, at the cost of whatever suffering and privation, the latter must be subdued in the interests of the former. To him the spiritual world must be everything, the temporal world nothing — ‘the world, the flesh, and Satan dwell around the path he treads.’ Here he has no continuing city, but he seeks one to come. In considering this attitude we are reminded of a person who proposes, at some uncertain future date, to remove, let us say, into a beautiful country house. He goes, for the time being, into lodgings. His friends come to see him, and remark on the ugliness or bareness of his

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dwelling. 'Oh,' he says, 'I am only here temporarily; it is not worth while making these rooms pretty, as I may be moving at any time into my beautiful home.'

In this connection, it is worthy of note how, at the present time, coincident with the decay of Christianity, is the renewal of the culture of beautiful things. Although in England hideous things are still in great request, yet beautiful things are far more easily obtainable and far more in demand than was the case, say, fifty years ago.

The attitude of the ancient Greeks towards life was the exact reverse of what we have just described. R. W. Livingstone¹ describes it as 'Humanism'—Man having been, to the Greek, 'the measure of all things.' He was very much occupied with this world and very little with the 'world to come.' Consequently he endeavoured to get as much as possible out of this world, by beautifying his surroundings, and by cultivating his family ties and the

¹ See *The Greek Genius and its Meaning to Us*. (The Clarendon Press, 1912.)

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qualities that would make him a good citizen. 'It is true that he admitted possibilities in the unseen ; but he minimised the inconveniences that might attend their existence, by making the unseen visible. He admitted the existence of gods, but he created them in his own human likeness, with his own human passions, and only differing from man by their immortality and greater power. . . . Some thinkers . . . have seen in man a twofold nature — God and beast ; and finding no reconciliation between his two natures, have been agonized by the conflict within this being.

“Half dust, half deity, alike unfit
To sink and soar”

The Greek was not conscious of such a distinction ; he only saw a unity “glorious in its action and in itself,” in which humanity was not distinct from divinity, nor body from soul. . . . For him the whole creation was not groaning and travailing in pain. He was awaiting for no glory to be revealed, with which the sufferings of this present time were

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not to be compared. The glory was already present to his eyes: flesh and blood for him did, or might, already in this terrestrial world possess the kingdom of God.'

Hence, for the Greeks, life possessed a beauty, a simplicity, a charm, which are singularly lacking in Christian civilisations, so that 'ancient Greek' and 'beautiful' have become for us almost synonymous terms.

'There are few more important problems than this,' continues the same author. 'Is humanism right? Is it right to take a purely human attitude towards life, to assume that man is the measure of all things and to believe that even though the unseen may be there, still we can know our duty and live our life without reference to it? This is perhaps the biggest question of the present day, the one most worth settling, the one which every one has to settle for himself.'

This is the problem which we must now attack. Is it really impossible to love and cultivate material beauty and to love and cultivate spiritual ideals also? Are these two

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things really 'contrary the one to the other' and wholly irreconcilable? When Christ proclaimed: 'Ye cannot serve God and Mammon,' did he mean to imply that we must neglect the physical in order to cultivate the spiritual? Did he not by the term 'Mammon' imply the excessive love of riches, of gluttony, of sensuality—all of which are the direct enemies of beauty?

We believe that men are beginning to make the discovery that the physical and the spiritual are in nowise opposed the one to the other, and that herein lies the solution of most, if not all, human sufferings and difficulties.

The truth is that 'the flesh and the spirit are really differing sides of the same thing. They ought not to struggle one against the other. The true function of the flesh is to express the spirit; in fact . . . to be gradually converted into Spirit.'¹ In other words we must realise that the divine essence is im-

¹ George Barlow, *The Higher Love*. 'Simple Life Series,' No. 17, p. 9. (A. C. Fifield, 1905.)

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manent in all things, whether manifest to earthly vision or not.

‘By Me all this world is pervaded in my unmanifested aspect; all beings have root in me, I am rooted in them.’ The wise, sacrificing ‘with the sacrifice of wisdom, worship Me as the one and the Manifold everywhere present. . . . I the oblation; I the sacrifice; I the fire; the burnt-offering I. . . . The enlightened ones perceive whence is this spirit in man; but foolish ones, even though they strive, discern not.’¹

Or again, as in the saying attributed to Christ, ‘Raise the stone and there thou shalt find Me. Cleave the wood and there am I.’

Beauty, whether spiritual or material, *i.e.* whether discernible to man’s physical or to his spiritual senses, is the result of conformity to some great Law. We have not yet apprehended the structure of this Law, but a violation of it, we know, results in ugliness. To indulge in gluttony, vice, excess, is to sin against it and to produce physical and moral ugliness.

¹ See *The Bhagavad-Gītā*.

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Yet we must remember that, so far, all great spiritual teachers have emphasised the fact that, in order to attain deep spiritual knowledge, the body must be kept in subjection. 'Intercourse with the body troubles the soul and hinders her from gaining truth and wisdom.' So said Socrates. And again, 'As long as we have this body and an evil of that sort is mingled with our souls, we shall *never* fully gain what we desire.' What does this signify?

When a man wishes to gain extreme proficiency in some particular art or science, he has to exclude other interests and occupations and keep his mind undistracted in order to be able to concentrate on his own particular subject. So with human beings in regard to their spiritual development. 'Those who wish to hasten this development must concentrate their energies in that direction. So long as we live the ordinary life of everyday mortals our thoughts and attention will be distracted by worldly concerns. He who desires wisdom beyond all things must remove himself from

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such distractions. Yet exaggerated asceticism is certainly not the best means to attain such an end. Man cannot live by bread alone, but under present conditions neither can he live without bread. It is in health that the body makes least claim on our attention. If the body is seriously neglected, it falls into ill-health, and then, indeed, it asserts its claims.

In what way can the body be made to render service to the spirit of man and help rather than hinder it upon its way? We think the answer is—by cultivating *health*. As health is no more to be obtained by over-indulgence than by repression, what we must seek after is to give it sufficient exercise, sufficient food and clothing, and sufficient care generally, to develop its powers to the fullest extent.

It is the misuse of the body, its neglect, its over-indulgence, our life under too artificial conditions, our hopeless neglect of the laws of health that have led to the frightful prevalence of disease and deformity for which our present civilisation is remarkable. What

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would the Greeks have thought of the fact that a vast number of human beings make their living solely by the manufacture of medical appliances and drugs for the relief of the ills with which the rest of humanity (and no doubt themselves also) are afflicted, and by tending their maladies? What would they say to the fortunes made from patent medicines? What would they think of the disclosures made in the Reports of our School Medical Officers? To such a pass has the teaching of Christianity brought the world.

How strange it is to contemplate the charitable efforts of Christian beings to relieve these evils and their absolute inability to see what is their primal cause! Supposing that the master of some Shipping Company were sending a vessel across the seas, laden with valuable cargo, let us say to the Islands of the Blest. Supposing that he were to give the following advice to its captain: 'My good fellow, the country for which you are bound is so beautiful, that you

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must endure with courage the perils of your journey and the chance of rocks and hurricanes. Your freight also is so precious that you must at all costs preserve it intact. But your ship! Unluckily your ship is a contemptible vessel for so noble a being as yourself to voyage in. Would that you could arrive at your destination with wings! But since it is ordained that you must travel by this method, and since no other is available, my advice to you is, neglect your ship—remembering that by comparison with what you have on board she is *of no value whatsoever . . .*’ This is precisely the orthodox attitude of Christianity towards the body.

We have to-day arrived at the dawn of a new era. And the keynote of this era will be the recognition of the fact that the spiritual and material are not, and should not be, in opposition, but are two aspects of the same creative energy. This amounts to a reconciliation between the spirit of ancient Greece and the nobler aspects of Christianity. To eliminate matter from our consideration

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is as futile as to eliminate the soul, and, as Eucken says, '*The Soul will not allow itself to be eliminated.* The very attempt to deny the soul only arouses it to greater activity.'

How will this new attitude affect morality in relation to sex and marriage? The answer, we think, may be given in the words of Ellen Key: 'Love must again become—though on a loftier level—that which it once was when the nations looked upon life with reverence: Religion.'¹ 'Love,' says Edward Carpenter, 'is an art, and the greatest of the arts,' and one which has been too long neglected. It is a 'complex of human relations—physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and so forth—all more or less necessary.' It requires 'all man's highest ingenuity and capacity to become skilled in it. . . . It is a great art for the same reason that the expression of Beauty is a great art—for the reason that Love itself (like Beauty) belongs to another plane of existence than

¹ *Love and Ethics*, p. 27.

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the plane of ordinary life and speech.”¹ Love and Beauty are, in reality, inseparable—Beauty inspires Love and Love generates Beauty.

Christianity does, it is true, uphold the doctrine of love. Love towards God, towards our neighbour, parental and brotherly love; but that most intimate and complete love—the love between man and woman—it has debased. Christ taught a great lesson when he showed that the service of Man was, in fact, the service of God. How should a man love God whom he had never seen, if he was unable to love his brother, whom he had seen? The history of Christianity furnishes proof of how often this teaching has been ignored—in the persecutions which it inflicted on man for ‘the love of God.’

The first point of importance, then, as an ideal for the New Morality, is to bring children up with the knowledge that the spiritual and the material world are not two

¹ Edward Carpenter, *The Drama of Love and Death*, pp. 35 and 49.

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remote opposites—but are co-existent; that blessedness does not exist in some remote region of time and space, but is procurable here on earth. A further ideal is to encourage in them a love for all beauty. To let them realise that there is nothing shameful in the idea of love, and, as they grow up, not to surround the mysteries of sex and birth with a veil of false sentiment and ignorance. To teach them that love in its fullest sense is the only thing to be sought for in marriage; the only thing that justifies the union of man and woman. ‘Young people who have received a lofty moral culture will admit of no fidelity save that of love, and of no union save that whose foundation is liberty.’¹ They will realise that in a love-union all aspects are desirable, ‘the physical for many very obvious reasons, including corporeal needs and health, and, perhaps, especially because it acts in the way of removal of barriers, and so *opens the path* to other intimacies. The mental is desirable to give form and outline

¹ Ellen Key, *De l'Amour et du Mariage*, p. 217.

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to the relation; the emotional, to provide the something to be expressed; and the spiritual to give permanence and absolute solidity to the whole structure.'¹ Upon the need for teaching young things the sense of that responsibility which rests upon them, as links in the great human chain, we have already dwelt.

The science of Eugenics is still in its infancy, and is an asset of the greatest value in the New Morality, emphasising, as it does, the precept that only the physically and mentally fit have any right to parenthood. Nevertheless the tendency of some ardent Eugenists appears to be too much in the direction of regarding the human race after the manner of cattle, to be bred only from the best stocks. They appear to regard the parental duties of marriage almost to the exclusion of the consideration of the marriage relation itself—that is, the child to them is everything; the parents, once they have produced the child, are of minor

² Edward Carpenter, *The Drama of Love and Death*, p. 37.

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importance. What is needed is, to fully develop the possibilities of happiness between men and women, to remove the stigma laid by Christianity on sex relations, to render marriage a gracious and beautiful institution, and to ensure it the fullest liberty and freedom. As Ellen Key says, 'The conception of a perfect union evidently implies the right for each individual to adapt his sexual life to his own requirements.'¹

To an individual who has been brought up with lofty ideals of the possibilities of love and with a high sense of his responsibilities, morality will become a second nature. With him 'a sense of social conduct will become intuitive. He will do right because his atmosphere is right, and not because his definite instincts are right.'²

When love, united to this sense of responsibility, is the dominating factor leading to marriage, worldly considerations will no longer

¹ Ellen Key, *De l'Amour et du Mariage*, p. 16.

² Hugh P. Vowles, 'The Tradition of the Great State,' *The Great State*, p. 370.

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occupy the front seats at the performance of the marriage rite. What a young girl will require of the man she is about to marry will be mental and moral affinity to her own nature, affinity of interests—and *health*. 'It would soon become the custom for a man who proposed for a girl's hand to add to the other things for which he is asked a medical statement of bodily fitness. . . . It would be perfectly simple. Once it was the custom, the man would go to his doctor for a certificate of health before he could sign the register. . . . As things are, before a marriage is concluded, the family lawyers meet to discuss matters; a meeting between the two doctors would be at least as useful, and would prevent many misfortunes.'¹

People complain that marriage under such conditions would be a very 'unromantic' affair. But we would ask, where is the 'romantic' element when a young girl ignorantly binds herself for life to a man who suffers from a contagious disease, which she

¹ Brieux, *Damaged Goods*, Act iii.

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herself contracts and then transmits to her offspring, if she has any ?

Young people who are brought up with lofty ideals of love and marriage will certainly be far more fastidious, and therefore less likely to rush into haphazard unions as the result of ill-considered impulses. . . . Even so, with all possible precautions, there may and must be failures. As Milton truly said : ‘ For all the wariness that can be used, it may befall a discreet man to be mistaken in his choice, and we have plenty of examples. The soberest and best-governed men are least practised in these affairs.’¹

If young people are given free opportunities of associating together, this risk will be greatly minimised. Even so, individuals are liable to grow apart, to develop on different lines with advancing years, and no precautions can hinder this. Therefore it is that there must be full liberty to separate if such a step becomes necessary.

Modern marriage is comparable to a *cage*.

¹ Milton, *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*.

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‘This prison that we call Marriage.’¹ The door is closed, and the two birds, provided with plenty of eatables and comfortable quarters, are at liberty to hop about and enjoy each other’s society to the fullest extent, but on no account must they seek for liberation. If, notwithstanding all precautions, they do manage to escape, their fate is very much the fate of caged birds who are let loose—the other birds outside tear them to pieces.

Marriage should rather suggest the idea of a *nest*, where the birds are free to build their own quarters and live their own lives, and rear their young in the manner that suits them best. They may have their quarrels, but at least no one interferes. Storms may destroy the nest they have so carefully built, but at least they cannot blame the other birds, and they are *free* — which is everything.

Most of the great modern movements are tending towards greater morality in the region of love and marriage, and of these movements

¹ Brieux, *The Three Daughters of M. Dupont*.

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perhaps the most important is *feminism*. It works for the release of woman from the degraded conception of her which is the outcome of the Christian attitude based on the teaching of St. Paul. And here we may quote the Laws of Manu, referred to by Professor Westermarck : ‘ Where women are honoured, there the gods are pleased ; but when they are not honoured, no sacred rite yields rewards. Where the female relations live in grief, the family soon perishes ; but that family where they are not unhappy ever prospers.’¹

A nobler ideal of womanhood, of woman’s rights and duties, is in process of development. She will no longer accept a homage based on the conception of her greater weakness and mental inferiority. Her aim is, not to resemble man, but to be his friend, his companion, his equal — and she recognises that this new liberty entails for her new responsibilities also. ‘ This woman, not less

² Westermarck, *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*, vol. i., chap. xxiii., p. 668.

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beautiful but with a beauty different from that of the woman of the past, awaits the lyre which shall sing her charms, for belated poets are always inspired by her shadow in the past.’¹

As regards the future, ‘we have every reason to believe that . . . in its relation to morality, religion will be increasingly restricted to emphasising ordinary moral rules and less preoccupied with inculcating special duties to the deity.’ In an imaginary picture of the Church in the ideal ‘Great State,’ the Rev. Conrad Noel writes, that its adherents ‘worship no barren and abstract duty called morality; morality was made for man, not man for morality. They love and worship people and not principles . . .’ The greatest moral teachers do no more than this—to lay down broad moral rules, and leave it to individuals to adapt them to their own particular needs. In this way the path is ever open to new developments, to loftier conceptions of life.

¹ Jean Finot, *Préjugé et Problème des Sexes*, chap. vi., p. 376.

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‘Thou sayest : Man’s measured path is all
gone o’er :
Up all his years, steeply, with strain and
sigh,
Man clomb until he touched the truth ;
and I,
Even I, am he whom it was destined for !
How should this be ? . . .’¹

It must be recognised by advocates of the New Morality that even *their* ideals are not the last word that can be spoken on the subject and that ‘leagues beyond those leagues, there is more sea.’ If morality be a standard of behaviour in regard to social relations—then the Real Morality is that which conduces to the greater happiness of mankind and to the satisfaction of his needs. Real religion may be described as the search of the soul after the realisation of Eternal Beauty. The needs of man’s nature vary according to his apprehension of that beauty. Hence the mutability of any Moral Law. Hence the impossibility of im-

¹ D. G. Rossetti, *The House of Life*.

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prisoning religious beliefs in any given formula, for each must find the 'Truth' 'by pathways of his own.'

Since a Moral Law which is unalterable, like that of the Medes and Persians, must result in stagnation (be it based on a mistaken conception of the teachings of Christ or of any other great Moral Reformer), our aim should be continually to renew our conceptions of morality. Let those whose ambition it is to keep mankind for ever in leading-strings, and who encourage him to steer his vessel only by the light of old moons—let these recall the words of that profound idealist, Maeterlinck: 'Even though' (as at present) 'a Moral Law seem on the eve of disappearing, we need have no cause for disquiet; its place will speedily be filled by a law that is greater still.'¹

¹ M. Maeterlinck, *Wisdom and Destiny*, p. 190.

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